

NO. 5
WINTER Issue

25¢

Science Fiction

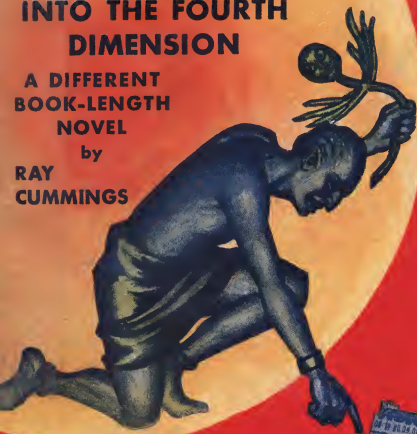
QUARTERLY

INTO THE FOURTH DIMENSION

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BOOK-LENGTH
NOVEL

by

**RAY
CUMMINGS**



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NO.
5

NEW
ISSUE

Science Fiction QUARTERLY

WINTER 1941-42

CLASSIC BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

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They knew the strange marauders could not be ghosts — but what, then, were they? The answer to the problem was stronger than the supernatural, and they found themselves in an unbelievable world of shadows. A novel to remember.

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SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY, Winter Issue, No. 5, published by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC. Office of publication, 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 69 Hudson St., N. Y. C. Application for second class entry pending at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass. Single copies, 25c. Yearly subscription, \$1.00.

INTO THE FOURTH DIMENSION

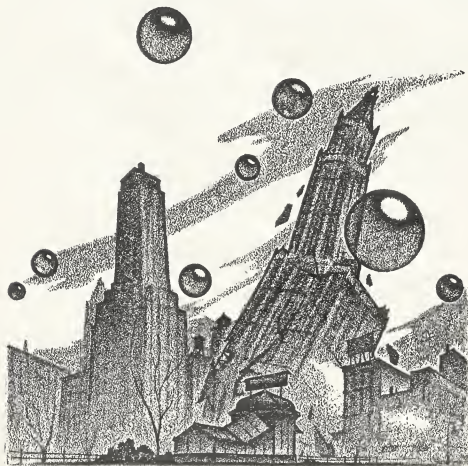
CHAPTER I

THE GHOSTS OF '46

THE first of the "ghosts" made its appearance in February of 1946. It was seen just after nightfall near the bank of a little stream known as Otter Creek, a few miles from Rutland, Vermont. There are willows along the creek-bank at this point. Heavy snow was on the ground. A farmer's wife saw the ghost standing beside the trunk of a tree. The evening was rather

dark. Clouds obscured the stars and the moon. A shaft of yellow light from the farmhouse windows came out over the snow; but the ghost was in a patch of deep shadow. It seemed to be the figure of a man standing with folded arms, a shoulder against the tree-trunk. It was white and shimmering; it glowed; its outlines were wavy and blurred. The farmer's wife screamed and rushed back into the house.

Up to this point the incident was not unusual. It would have merited no more than the briefest and most



by RAY CUMMINGS

Are there other worlds existing side by side with ours, yet unseen and unsuspected? Here is the incredible tale of three who went through the wall that bars the way to this shadowy realm and found a strange land, a stranger people, and a fantastic enemy.

local newspaper attention; reported perhaps to some organization interested in psychical research to be filed with countless others of its kind. But when the farmer's wife got back to the house and told her husband what she had seen, the farmer went out and saw it also; and with him, his two grown sons and his daughter. There was no doubt about it; they all saw the apparition still standing motionless exactly where the woman had said.

There was a telephone in the farmhouse. They telephoned their nearest neighbors. The telephone girl got the news. Soon it had spread to the village of Procter; and then to Rutland itself. The ghost did not

move. By ten o'clock that evening the road before the farmer's house was crowded with cars; a hundred or more people were trampling the snow of his corn-field cautiously, from a safe distance regarding that white motionless figure.

It chanced that I was also an eyewitness to this, the first of the ghosts of '46. My name is Robert Manse. I was twenty-six years old that winter—correspondent in the New York office of a Latin-American export house. With Wilton Grant and his sister Beatrice—whom I counted the closest of my few real friends—I was in Rutland that Saturday evening. Will was a chemist; some business which he had not detailed to me had

IN RESPONSE TO THE MANY REQUESTS WE HAVE RECEIVED, WE ARE REPRINTING THIS FAMOUS NOVEL—ONE OF THE MOST UNUSUAL EVER CONCEIVED BY A SCIENCE FICTION AUTHOR.



called him to Vermont from his home near New York. In spite of the snowy roads he had wanted to drive up, and had invited me to go along. We were dining in the Rutland Hotel when people began talking of this ghost out toward Procter.

It was about ten-thirty when we arrived at the farm. Cars were lined along the road in both directions. People trampling the road, the fields, clustering about the farmhouse; talking, shouting to one another.

The field itself was jammed, but down by the willows along the creek there was a segment of snow as yet untrampled, for the crowd had dared approach so far but no farther. Even at this distance we could see the vague white blot of the apparition. Will said, "Come on, let's get down nearer. You want to go, Bee?"

"Yes," she said.

We began elbowing and shoving our way through the crowd. It was snowing again now. Dark; but some of the people had flashlights which darted about; and occasionally a smoker's match would flare. The crowd was good-natured; with courage bolstered by its numbers, the awe of the supernatural was gone. But they all kept at a safe distance.

Somebody said, "Why don't they shoot at it? It won't move—can't they make it move?"

"It does move—I saw it move, it turned its head. They're going up to it pretty soon—see what it is."

I asked a man, "Has it made any sound?"

"No," he said. "They claim it moaned, but it didn't. The police are there now, I think—and they're going to shoot at it. I don't see what they're afraid of. If they wanted me to I'd walk right up to it." He began elbowing his way back toward the road.

WE FOUND ourselves presently at the front rank, where the people were struggling to keep themselves from being shoved forward by those behind them. Thirty feet across the empty snow was the ghost. It seemed, as they had said, the figure of a man, blurred and quivering as though moulded of a heavy white mist at every instant about to dissipate. I stared, intent upon remembering what I was seeing. Yet it was difficult. With a quick look the imagination seemed to picture the tall lean figure of a man with folded arms, meditatively leaning against the tree-trunk. But like a faint star which vanishes when one stares at it, I could not see a single detail. The clothes, the face, the very outlines of the body itself seemed to quiver and elude my sight when I concentrated my attention upon them.

Yet the figure, motionless, was there. Half a thousand people were now watching it. Bee said, "See its shoulder, Rob! It isn't touching the tree—it's inside the tree! It's leaning against something else, inside the tree!"

The dark outline of the tree-trunk was steady reality; it did seem as though that shadowy shoulder were within the tree.

A farmer's boy beside us had a handful of horseshoes. He began throwing them. One of them visibly went through the ghost. Then a man with a star on the lapel of his overcoat fired a shot. It spat yellow flame. Where the bullet went no one could have told, save that it hit the water of the creek. The specter was unchanged.

The crowd was murmuring. A man near us said, "I'll walk up to it. Who wants to go along?"

"I'll go," said Will unexpectedly; but Bee held him back.

The volunteer demanded, "Officer, may I go?"

"I ain't stoppin' you," said the man with the star. He retreated a few steps, waving his weapon.

"Well then put that gun away. It might go off while I'm down there."

Somebody handed the man a broken chunk of plank. He started slowly off. Others cautiously followed behind him. One was waving a broom. A woman shouted shrilly, "That's right—sweep it away—we don't want it here." A laugh went up, but it was a high-pitched, nervous laugh.

The man with the plank continued to advance. He called belligerently, "Get out of there, you! We see you—get away from there!" Then abruptly he leaped forward. His waving plank swept through the ghost; as he lunged, his own body went within its glow. A panic seemed to descend upon him. He whirled, flailing his arms, kicking, striking at the empty air as one tries to fight off the attack of a vicious wasp. Panting, he stumbled backward over his plank, gathered himself and retreated.

The white apparition was unchanged. "It was just like a glow of white light," the attacker told us later. "I could see it—but couldn't feel it. Not a thing—there wasn't anything there!"

The ghost had not moved, though some said that it turned its head a triple. Then from the crowd came a man with a powerful light. He flooded it on the specter. Its outlines dimmed, but we could still see it. A shout went up. "Turn that light off! It's moving! It's moving away!"

It was moving. Floating or walking? I could not have told. Bee said that distinctly she saw its legs moving as it walked. It seemed to turn; and slowly, hastelessly it retreated.

Moving back from us. As though the willows, the creek-bank, the creek itself were not there, it moved backward. The crowd, emboldened, closed in. At the water's edge we stood. The figure apparently was now within or behind the water. It seemed stalking down some invisible slope. Occasionally it turned aside as though to avoid some obstruction. It grew smaller, dimmer by its greater distance from us until it might have been the mere reflection of a star down there in the water of the creek; then it blinked, and vanished.

There were thousands who watched for that ghost the following night, but it did not appear. The affair naturally was the subject of widespread newspaper comment; but when after a few days no one else had seen the ghost, the newspapers began turning from the serious to the jocular angle.

THEN, early in March, the second ghost was reported. In the Eastern Hemisphere this time. It was discovered in midair, near the Boro Badur, in Java. Thousands of people watched it for over an hour that evening. It was the figure of a man, seated on something invisible in the air nearly a hundred feet above the ground. It sat motionless as though contemplating the crowd of watchers beneath it. And then it was joined by other figures! Another man, and a woman. The reports naturally were confused, contradictory. But they agreed in general that the other figures came from the dimness of distance; came walking up some invisible slope until they met the seated figure. Like a soundless motion picture projected into the air, the crowd on the ground saw the three figures in movement; saw them—the reports said—conversing; saw them at last move slowly backward and downward

within the solid outlines of the great temple, until finally in the distance they disappeared.

Another apparition was seen in Nome; another in Cape Town. From everywhere they were now reported. Some by daylight, but most at night. By May the newspapers featured nothing else. Psychological research societies sprang into unprecedented prominence and volubility. Learned men of spiritualistic tendencies wrote reams of ponderous essays which the newspapers eagerly printed.

Amid the reports now, the true from the false became increasingly difficult to distinguish. Notoriety seekers, cranks and quacks of every sort burst into print with weird tales of ghostly manifestations. Hysterical young girls, morbidly seeking publicity, told strange tales which in more sober days no newspaper would have dared to print. And in every country charlatans were doing a thriving business with the trappings of spiritualism.

In late July the thing took another turn. A new era began—a sinister era which showed the necessity for something more than all this aimless talk. Four men were walking one night along a quiet country road near a small English village. They were men of maturity, reputable, sober, middle-aged citizens. Upon the road level they observed the specters of four or five male figures, which instead of remaining motionless rushed forward to the attack. These ghosts were ponderable! The men distinctly felt them; a vague feeling, indescribable, perhaps as though something soft had brushed them. The fight, if such it could be called, amounted to nothing. The men flailed their arms in sudden fear; and the apparitions sped away. Greenish, more solid-looking than those heretofore seen.

This was more than mere visibility—an actual encounter. These four men were of the type who could be believed. The report was reliable. And the next night, in a Kansas farmhouse, the farmer and his wife were awakened by the scream of their adolescent daughter. They rushed into her bedroom. She was in bed, and bending over her was the apparition of a man. Its fingers were holding a lock of the girl's long black hair. At the farmer's shout, the ghost turned; its hand was raised—and the farmer and his wife both saw that the shadowy fingers had lifted the girl's tresses which they were clutching. Then it dropped them and moved away, not through the walls of the room, but out through the open window.

The girl was dead. She had suffered from heart trouble; was dead of fright, undoubtedly. It was the beginning of the era of menace. And that next afternoon Wilton Grant telephoned me. His voice had a strange tenseness to it, though it was grave and melodious as always.

"Come out and see us this evening, will you, Rob?"

"Why, yes," I said. I had not seen them for over a month—an estrangement which I had not understood and which hurt me had fallen between us. "Of course I will," I added. "How's Bee?"

"She's been quite ill. . . . No, not dangerous, she's better now. Don't fail us, Rob. About eight o'clock. . . . That's fine. We—I need you. You've been a mighty good friend, letting us treat you the way we have—"

He hung up. With an ominous sense of danger hanging over me, I went out to see them at the hour he had named.

CHAPTER II

GROPING AT THE UNKNOWN

WILTON GRANT was at that time just under forty. He was a tall, spare man of muscular build, lean but not powerful. His smooth-shaven face was large-featured, rough-hewn, with a shock of brown hair above it—hair turning grey at the temples. Beneath heavy brows his grey eyes were deep-set, somber. His ruddy-brown complexion, the obvious strength of his frame at a quick glance gave him an out-of-doors look; a woodsman cast in the mould of a gentleman. Yet there was something poetic about him as well; that wavy, unruly hair, the brooding quality of his eyes. When he spoke, those eyes frequently twinkled with the good nature characteristic of him. But in repose, the somberness was there unmistakable; an unvoiced, brooding melancholy.

Yet there was nothing morbid about Wilton Grant. A wholeness, mental and physical, radiated from him. He was a jolly companion, a man of intellectuality and culture. His deep voice had a pleasing resonance suggestive of the public speaker. Normally rather silent, chary of speech, he could upon occasion draw fluently from a vocabulary of which many an orator would be proud.

He was a bachelor. I often wondered why, for he seemed of a type that would be immensely attractive to women. He did not avoid them; the pose of a woman-hater would have been abhorrent to him. Yet no woman to my knowledge had ever interested him, even mildly. Except his sister. They were orphans and she was his constant companion. They were both in fact, rather chary

of friends; absorbed in their work, in which she took an active part. Their home and laboratory was an unpretentious frame cottage in a Westchester village of suburban New York. They lived quietly, modestly, with only one automobile, and no 'plane.

Will opened the door for me himself, smiling as he extended his big, hearty hand. "Well! You came, Rob? You're very forgiving—that's the mark of a true friend." He led me into the old-fashioned sitting room. "I'm not going to apologize—"

"Don't," I said. "I knew of course you had some reason—"

We were seated. He said with a nod, "Yes. A reason—you'll hear it now—tonight—"

His voice trailed away. It made my heart beat faster. He had changed. I saw him suddenly older.

"Where's Bee?" I asked out of the silence.

He jerked himself back from his reverie. "Upstairs. She'll be down in a moment. She's been ill, Rob."

"But you said not seriously."

"No. She's better now. It's been largely mental—she's been frightened, Rob. A terrible strain—that's why I thought it better for us to isolate ourselves for a while—"

"Oh, then that's why—"

"That's why I wrote you so peremptorily not to come to see us any more. I was upset myself, I needn't have been so crude—"

"Please don't apologize, Will. I—I didn't understand, but—"

"I'm not. I'm just telling you. But now Bee thought we should have you with us. Our best friend, you understand? And it will make things easier for her—naturally she's frightened—"

My hand went to his arm. What I had meant to say I do not know, for

Bee at that moment entered the room. A girl of twenty-four. Tall, slim and graceful.

She was dressed now in a clinging negligee which seemed to accentuate the slim grace of her. But the marks of illness were plain upon her face; a pallor; her eyes, though they smiled at me with the smile of greeting upon her lips, had the light of fear in them; her hand as I took it was chill, and its fingers felt thin and wan.

"Bee!"

"It's good to see you, Rob. Will has been apologizing for us, I suppose—"

These friends of mine calling me to them in their hour of need. I had been annoyed, hurt; I had not realized how deep was my affection for them . . . for Bee. . . . Vaguely I wondered now if their trouble—this fear that lay so obviously upon them both—concerned the coming of the ghosts. . . .

Bee sat close beside me, as though by my nearness she felt a measure of protection.

WILL faced us. For a moment he was silent. Then he began, "I have a good deal to say, Rob—I want to be brief—"

I interrupted impulsively, "Just tell me this. Does it, this thing whatever it is—does it concern the ghosts?"

I was aware of a shudder that ran over Bee. Will did not move. "Yes," he said. "It does. And these ghosts have changed. We knew they would—we've been expecting it."

"That poor girl," Bee said softly. "Dead—dead in her bed of fright. You read about it, Rob?"

"A menace," Will went on. "The world is just realizing it now. Ghosts, changing from shadow to sub-

stance—" He stopped, then added abruptly, "We've never told you much about our work—our business—have we?"

They had in truth always been reticent. I had never been in their laboratory. They were engaged I understood, chiefly with soil analysis; sometimes people would come out to consult them. Beyond such a meager idea I knew nothing about it.

Will said abruptly, "Our real work we have never told anyone. It concerns—well, a research into realms of chemistry and physics unknown. I have been delving into it for nearly ten years, and then Bee grew old enough to help me. We've made progress—" His smile was very queer. "Tonight—I'm ready to show you something that I can do."

They seemed to torture Bee, these words of her brother's. I heard the sharp intake of her breath, saw her white fingers locked tensely in her lap.

"Not—not tonight, Will."

"Tonight—as good a night as any other. . . . Rob, would it surprise you to know we anticipated the coming of the ghosts years ago? Not that they would come, but the possibility of it. Ghosts! What do you think they are, Rob?"

"Why ghosts—ghosts are—"

"Spirits of the dead made visible?" His manner was suddenly vehement; his tone contemptuous. "Earth-bound spirits! Astral bodies housing souls whose human bodies are in their graves! Rubbish! These are not that sort of ghosts."

I stammered, "But then—what are they?"

"Call them ghosts, the word is as good as any other." His voice grew calmer; he went on earnestly, "I want you to understand me—it's necessary—and yet I must not be too

technical with you. Let me ask you this—you'll see in a moment that none of this is irrelevant. How many dimensions has a point?"

At my puzzled look he smiled. "I'd better not question you, Rob, but you won't find me hard to understand. A point—an infinitesimal point in space—has no dimension. It has only location. That's clear, isn't it? A line has one dimension—length. A plane surface has length and breadth; a cube, length, breadth and thickness. The world of the cube, Rob, is the world we think we live in—the world of three dimensions. You've heard of that intangible something they call the fourth dimension? We think it does not concern us—but it does. We ourselves have four dimensions. We are the world of the fourth dimension. But the fourth is not so readily understood as the other three."

He paused for an instant, then added, "The fourth dimension is time, Rob. Not a new conception to scientists—think a moment—how would you define time?"

"Time," I said, "Well, I read somewhere that time is what keeps everything from happening at once."

HE DID not smile. "Quite so. It is something in the universe of our consciousness along which we progress in measured rate from birth to death—from the beginning to the end.

"We are living in a four-dimensional world—a world of length, breadth, thickness and time. The first three, to our human perception, have always been linked together. Time—I do not know why—seems to our minds something essentially different. Yet it is not. Our universe is a blending of all four.

"Let me give you an example. That book there on the table—it exists be-

cause it has length, breadth and thickness. But Rob, it also has duration. It is matter, persisting both in space and in time. You see how the element time is involved? I'll go further. We know that two material bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time. With three of the dimensions only—that is, if theoretically we remove the identical time factor—they do not conflict. You're confused, Rob?"

"I'm not quite sure what you're aiming at," I said.

"You'll understand in a moment. Matter, as we know it, is merely a question of vibration. It is, isn't it?"

"I know light is vibration," I responded. "And sound. And heat, and—"

He interrupted me. "The very essence of matter is vibration. Do you knew of what matter is composed? What is the fundamental substance? Let us see. First, we find matter is composed only of molecules. They are substances, vibrating in space. But of what are molecules composed? Atoms, vibrating in space. Atoms are substance. Of what are they composed?"

"Electrons?" I said dubiously.

"Protons and rings of electrons. Let us cling to substance, Rob. These electrons are merely negative, disembodied electricity—not matter, but mere vibration. They—these electrons—revolve around a central, positive nucleus. This then, is all the substance that matter has. But when you penetrate this inner nucleus, what do you find? Substance? Not at all. This proton, as they sometimes term it, this last inner stronghold of substance, is itself a mere vortex—a whirlpool in space!"

I groped at the thought. Matter, substance, everything tangible in my whole conscious universe, robbed of

its entity, reduced to mere vibration in empty space. Vibration of what?

"It's appalling, Rob, the unreality of everything. Metaphysicians say that nothing exists save in the perception of it by our human senses. . . . I was talking of the dimension, time. It is the indispensable factor of vibration. That's obvious. Motion is nothing but the simultaneous change of matter in space and time. You see how blended all the factors are? You cannot deal with one without the others. And mark you this, Rob—you can subdivide matter until it becomes a mere vortex in empty space. Can you wonder then—"

I had noticed Bee gazing intently across the room. "Will!" she said suddenly; her voice was hardly more than a whisper. "It's there now, Will!"

THE room was brightly illuminated by a cluster of globes near the ceiling. Will left his seat, calmly, unhurried, and switched them off. There was only the small table light left. It cast a yellow circle of light downward; most of the room was in shadow. And over in a corner I saw the glowing apparition of a recumbent man no more than ten feet from us.

Will said, "Come here, Rob—let me show you this." His voice was grave and unfurried. As I crossed the room hesitatingly, Bee was with me, forcing herself to calmness. She said, "It's here most of the time. Watching us! It seems to be on guard—always watching—"

Will drew me beside him. Together we stood within a foot of the spectre. It took my courage, but after a moment the grewsome element seemed to leave me for Will stood as though the thing were a museum specimen, explaining it.

I saw, so far as I can put the sight into words, the vibrating white shape of a man reclining on one elbow. It was slightly below the level of the floor, most of it within or behind the floor, the outlines of which were plainer than the apparition mingled with them. The head and shoulders were raised about to the level of our ankles.

A man? I could not call it that. Yet there was a face which after a moment I could have sworn was human-featured; I could almost think I saw its eyes, staring at me intently.

Will stooped down and passed his hand slowly through the face. "You can feel nothing. It has visibility—that property only in common with us. Try it."

I forced my hand down to the thing, held it there. It was like putting one's fingers into a dim area of light.

"Is it—it is alive?" I asked.

"Alive?" Will's tone was grim. "That depends on what you mean by alive. It can reason, if that answers you."

"I mean—can it move?"

"It moves," said Bee. "It watches us—follows us—" She shuddered.

The details of the figure? I stepped back to see it better. It seemed now a man clothed in normal garments . . . a malevolent face, with eyes watching me . . . Was that face my imagination, or did I really see it?

I MUST have stammered my thoughts aloud, for Will said, "What we see, and what really exists, has puzzled metaphysicians for centuries. Who knows what this thing really looks like? You do not, nor do I. Our minds are capable of visualizing things only within the

limits of an accustomed mould. You see that thing as a man of fairly human aspect, and so do I. The details are elusive; but stare at them for a day and your imagination will supply them all. That's what you do in infancy with the whole material world about you—mould it to fit our human perceptions. But what everything really looks like—who can tell?"

"Can it—can it hear us?" I demanded.

"No—I do not think so. It can see us, no more. And it has no fear." With a belligerent gesture he added humorously, "Get up, you, or I'll wring your neck!"

"Will, don't joke like that!" Bee protested.

He turned away and switched on the main lights. I could still see the thing there, but now it was paler—wan like starlight before the coming dawn. Will turned his back on it and sat down. His face had gone solemn again.

"These things are materializing, Rob. They have become a menace. That's why what I'm planning to do should be done at once. . . . Bee! Will you please not interrupt me!" It was the first time I had ever heard his tone turn sharp with her, and I realized then the strain he was under. "Rob, listen to me. Science has given me the power to do what I'm planning, but we won't discuss that now. Call this anything you like, What I want you to know is—there is another realm about us into which—under given conditions—our consciousness can penetrate. Call it the Unknown. The realm of Unthought Things. A material world? I've shown you, Rob, that nothing is substance if you go to the inside of it."

Dimly I was groping at a hundred will-o'-the-wisps, my mind trembling upon the verge of his meaning, my imagination winging into distant caverns of unthought things that hid in the elusive dark. Could this be science?

He was saying, "My mind cannot fathom such another realm, nor can yours. You think of land, water, trees, houses, people. Those are only words for what we think we see and feel. But there are beings—sentient beings—in this other state of consciousness, we can now be sure. For Rob, they are coming out! Don't you understand? They have already come into the borderland between the consciousness of their realm and ours."

He would not let me interrupt him. "Wait, Rob! Let us say they have a lust for adventure—or a lust for something else—they are coming out nevertheless. A menace to us—that girl in Kansas is dead." He swept his hand in gesture at the apparition behind him. "That thing is watching me. As Bee says, it is on guard here. Because, Rob, I found a way of transmuting my identity out of this conscious realm of ours into that same borderland where these things we call ghosts are roaming. And they know it—and so they're on guard—watching me."

He paused for the space of a breath. Bee, white-faced, tremulous, turned to me. "Don't let him do it, Rob!"

"I must," he declared vehemently. "Rob, that's why we needed you here—to wait here with Bee. I'm going in there tonight—into the shadows, the borderland, whatever it is. These—nameless things are striving to come out—but I'm going to turn them back if I can!"

CHAPTER III

INTO THE SHADOWS

THERE were few preparations to make, for Wilton Grant had planned this thing very carefully. Our chief difficulty was with Bee. The girl was quite distraught; illness, the fear which for weeks had been dragging her down, completely submerged the scientist in her. And then abruptly she mastered herself, smiled through her tears.

"That's more like it, Bee." Will glanced aside at me with relief. "I couldn't understand you. Why Bee, we've been working at this thing for years."

"I'm all right now." She smiled at us—a brave smile though her lips were still trembling. "You're—about ready, aren't you?"

They had set aside a small room on the lower floor of the house—a sort of den which now was stripped of its accustomed hangings and furniture. It had two windows, looking out to the garden and lawn about the house. They were some six feet above the ground. It was a warm mid-summer evening; we had the lower sashes opened, but the shades fully drawn lest some neighbor or passerby observe us from without. On the floor of this room lay a mattress. There was a small table, a clock, two easy chairs. For the rest it was bare. Its white plaster walls, devoid of hangings, gave it somewhat the sanitary look of a room in a hospital.

We had been so occupied with Bee that Will had as yet given me no word of explanation. He left the little room now, returning in a moment

with some articles which he deposited on the table. I eyed them silently; a shiver of fear, apprehension, awe—I could not define it—passed over me. Will had placed on the table a carafe of water; a glass; a small vial containing a number of tiny pellets; a cylindrical object with wires and terminal posts which had the appearance of a crude home-made battery—four wires each some ten feet in length, terminating each in a circular metallic band.

I glanced at Bee. Outwardly now she was quite composed. She smiled at me. "He'll explain in a moment. Rob. It's quite simple."

We were ready. By the clock on the table it was twenty minutes of ten. Will faced us.

"I'd like to start by ten o'clock," he began quietly. "The time-factor will be altered—I want to compute the difference—when I return—as closely as I can."

I had the ill grace to attempt an interruption, but he silenced me.

"Wait, Bob—twenty minutes is not a long time for what I have to say and do." He had motioned us to the easy chairs, and seated himself cross-legged on the mattress before us. His gaze was intent upon my face.

"This is not the moment for any detailed explanation, Rob. I need only say this: As I told you a while ago, the fundamental substance of which our bodies are composed is—not substance, but a mere vortex. A whirlpool, a vibration let me term it. And the quality of this vibration—this vortex—the time-factor controlling it, governs the material character of our conscious universe. From birth to death—from the beginning to the end—we and all the substance of our universe move along this unalterable, measured flow of time.

"Do I make my meaning clear? From—nothing but a vibrating whirlpool the magic of chemistry has built with this unalterable time-factor what we are pleased to call substance—material bodies. These material bodies have three varying dimensions—length, breadth and thickness. But each of them inherently is endowed also with the same basic time-factor. The rate of time-flow governing them, let me say, is identical."

He spoke now more slowly, with measured words as though very carefully to reach my understanding.

"You must conceive clearly, Rob, that every material body in our universe is passing through its existence at the same rate. Now if we take any specific point in time—which is to say any particular instant of time—and place in it two material bodies, those two material bodies must of necessity occupy two separate portions of space. That's obvious isn't it? Two bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time.

"Now Rob, I have spoken of this unalterable measured flow of time along which all our substance is passing. But it is not unalterable. I have found a way of altering it."

He raised his hand against my murmur, and went on, carefully as before. "What does this do? It gives a different basic vibration to matter. It gives a different rate of time-flow, upon which, building up from a fundamental vortex of changed character, we reach substance—a state of matter—quite different from that upon which our present universe reposes. A different state of matter, Rob—it still has length, breadth and thickness—but a different flow of time.

"You follow me? Now, if we take a material body of this—call it sec-

ondary state—and place it in the same space with a body of our primary state, they can and do occupy that space without conflict at the same instant of time.

"Why? Ah Rob, it would take a keener mind than mine or yours to answer that, or to answer the why of almost anything. The knowledge we poor mortals have is infinitesimal compared to the knowledge we have not. I can conceive vaguely however, that two primary bodies, placed in identical points of space and time would be moving through time at identical rates and thus stay together and conflict. Whereas, with a primary and secondary body, their differing time-flows would separate them after what we might call a mere infinitesimal instant of coincidence."

HIS gesture waved away that part of the subject. He rose to his feet. "I have particularized even more than I intended, Rob. Let me say now, only that the pellets in this little vial contain a chemical which acts upon the human organism in the way I have pictured. It alters the fundamental vibration upon which this substance—these bones, this flesh we call a body—this substance of my being, is built.

"Just a moment more, Rob, then you shall question me all you like. So much for the transmutation of organic substance. Inorganic substance—that table, my shirt, that glass of water—theoretically all of them could be transmuted as well. I have not, however, practically been able to accomplish that. But I have—invented, if you like, an inorganic substance which I can transmute. It is nameless; it is this."

He was coatless, and now he stripped off his white linen shirt.

Like a bathing suit, he had on a low-cut, tight-fitting garment. It seemed a fabric thin as silk, yet I guessed that it was metallic, or akin to metal. A dull putty-color, but where the light struck it there was a gleam, a glow as of iridescence.

"This substance," he added, "I can—take with me." He indicated the wires, the battery if such it were. "By momentarily charging it, Rob, with the current I have stored here. It is not electrical—though related to it of course—everything is—our very bodies themselves—a mere form of what we call electricity."

He was disrobing; the gleaming garment fitted him from shoulder to thigh. About his waist was a belt with pouches; in the pouches small objects all of this same putty-colored substance.

I burst out, "This is all very well. But how—how will you get back?"

"The effect will wear off," he answered. "The tendency of all matter, Rob, is to return to its original state. I conceive also that in the case of human organism, the mind—the will—to some extent may control it. Indeed I am not altogether sure but that the mind, properly developed, might control the entire transmutation. Perhaps in this secondary state, it can. I am leaving that to chance, to experimentation."

I said, "How long will you be gone?"

He considered that gravely. "Literally, Rob, there is no answer to that—but I know what you mean, of course. I may undergo a mental experience that will seem a day, a week, a month—measured by our present standards. But to you, sitting here waiting for me—" He shrugged. "By that clock there, an hour perhaps. Or five hours—I hope no more."

My mind was groping with all that he had said. I was confused. There was so much that I no more than vaguely half understood; so much that seemed just beyond the grasp of my comprehension. I seemed to have a thousand questions I would ask, yet scarce could I frame one of them intelligently. I said finally:

"You say you may be gone what will seem a day, yet by our clock here it will be only a few hours. This—This other state of existence then moves through time faster?"

"I conceive it so, yes."

"But then—are you going into the future, Will? Is that what it will be?"

He smiled, but at once was as grave as before. "Your mind is trying to reconcile two conditions irreconcilable. You may take an apple and try to add it to an orange and think you get two apple-oranges. But there is no such thing. Our future—let us call it that which has not yet happened to us but is going to happen. I cannot project myself into that. If I could—if I did—at once would the future be for me no longer the future, but the present.

"The conception is impossible. Or again—in this other state—I must of necessity exist always in the present. Nor can you compare them—reconcile one state of existence with the other." He stopped abruptly, then went on with his slow smile. "Don't you see, Rob, there are no words even, with which I can express what I am trying to make you realize. That being reclined there in the other room a while ago and watched us. Perhaps for what it conceived to be what we would conceive a day were we to experience it."

His smile turned whimsical. "The words become futile. Don't you see that? The future of that being is

merely what has not yet happened to it. To compare that with our own consciousness is like trying to add an apple to an orange."

DURING all this Bee had sat watching us, listening to our talk, but had not spoken. And as, an hour before in the other room I had noticed her glancing fearsomely around, again now her gaze drifted away; and I heard her murmur.

"Oh, I hoped it would be gone—not come to us in here!"

We followed her gaze. Standing perhaps a foot lower than the floor of our room and slightly behind the side wall was that self-same spectral figure. The intent to watch us, to enter perhaps into a frustration of our plans, with which my imagination now endowed its purpose, made me read into its attitude a tenseness of line; an alertness, even a guarded wariness which had not seemed inherent to it before. Was this thing indeed aware of our purpose? Was it waiting for Wilton Grant to come into the shadows to meet it upon its own ground? With an equality of contact, was it then planning to set upon him?

Bee was murmuring, "It's waiting for you. Will, it's waiting for you to come—" Shuddering words of apprehension, of which abruptly she seemed ashamed for she checked them, going to the table where she began adjusting the apparatus.

"I'm coming," said Will grimly. "It will do well to wait, for I shall be with it presently." He stood for a moment before the thing, contemplating it silently. Then he turned away, turned his back to it; and a new briskness came to his manner.

"Rob, I'm ready. Bee knows exactly what we are to do. I want you to know also, for upon the ac-

tions of you two, in a measure depends my life. I shall sit here on the mattress. Perhaps, if I am more distressed than I anticipate, I shall lie down. Bee will have charge of the current. There will come a point in my departure when you must turn off the current, disconnect the wires from me. If I am able, I will tell you, or sign to you when that point is reached. If not—well then, you must use your own judgment."

"But I—I have no idea—" I stammered. Suddenly I was trembling. The responsibility thrust thus upon me seemed at that moment unbearable.

"Bee has," he interrupted quietly. "In general I should say you must disconnect when I have reached the point where I am—" He halted as though in doubt how to phrase it—"the point where I am half substance, half shadow."

To my mind came a mental picture which then seemed very horrible; but resolutely I put it from me.

"You're ready, Bee?" he asked.

"Quite ready, Will." She was counting out a number of the tiny pellets with hands untrembling. The woman in Bee was put aside; she stood there a scientist's assistant, cool, precise, efficient.

"I think I should like less light," he said; and he turned off all the globes but one. It left the room in a flat, dull illumination. He took a last glance around. The window sashes were up, but the shades were lowered. A gentle breeze from outside fluttered one of them a trifle. Across the room the spectre, brighter now, stood immobile. The clock marked one minute of ten.

"Good," said Will. He seated himself cross-legged in the center of the mattress. In an agony of confusion

and helplessness I stood watching while Bee attached the four wires to the garment he wore. One on each of his upper arms, and about his thighs where the short trunks ended.

Again I stammered, "Will, is this—is this all you're going to tell us?"

He nodded. "All there is of importance.... A little tighter, Bee. That's it—we must have a good contact."

"I mean," I persisted, "when you are—are shadow, will we be able to see you?"

He gestured. "As you can see that thing over there, yes."

His very words seemed unavoidably horrid. Soon he would be—a thing, no more.

"Shall you stay here, Will, where we can see you?"

He answered very soberly, "I do not know. That, and many other things, I do not know. I will do my best to meet what comes."

"But you'll come back here—here to this room, I mean?"

"Yes—that is my intention. You are to wait here, in those chairs. One of you always awake, you understand—for I will need you, in the coming back."

THERE seemed nothing else I could ask, and at last the moment had come. Bee handed him the pellets, and held the glass of water. For one brief instant I had the sense that he hesitated, as though here upon the brink the human fear that lies inherent to every mortal must have rushed forth to stay his hand. But an instant only, for calmly he placed the pellets in his mouth and washed them down with the water.

"Now—the current, Bee."

His voice had not changed; but a moment after I saw him steady himself against the mattress with his

hands; momentarily his eyes closed as though with a rush of giddiness, but then they opened and he smiled at me while anxiously I bent over him.

"All right—Rob." He seemed breathless. "I think—I shall lie down." He stretched himself at full length on his back; and with a surge of apprehension I knelt beside him. I saw Bee throw on the little switch. She stood beside the table, and her hand remained upon the switch. Her face was pale, but impassive of expression. Her gaze was on her brother and I think I have never seen such an alert steadiness as marked it.

A moment passed. The current was on, but I remarked unmistakably that no sound came from it. The room indeed had fallen into an oppressive hush. The flapping shades momentarily had stilled. Only the clock gave sound, like the hurried thumping of some giant heart, itself of all in the room most alive.

Wilton Grant lay quiet. His eyes were fixed on the ceiling; he had gone a trifle pale and moisture was on his forehead, but his breathing, though faster, was unlabored.

I could not keep silent. "You—all right, Will?"

At once his gaze swung to me. A smile to reassure me plucked at his parted lips. "All—right, yes." His voice a half-whisper, not stressed, almost normal; and yet it seemed to me then that a thinness had come to it.

Another moment. The putty-colored garment he wore had lost the vague sheen of its reflected light and was glowing with an illumination now inherent to it. A silver glow, bright like polished metal; then with a greenish cast as though phosphorescent. And then, did I fancy

that its light, not upon it or within it, but behind it, showed the garment turning translucent?

I became aware now of a vague humming. An infinitely tiny sound—a throbbing hum fast as the wings of a humming bird, near at hand, very clear, yet infinitely tiny. The battery—the current; and yet in a moment with a leaping of my heart, I knew it was not the current but a humming vibration from the body of Wilton Grant. A sense of fear—I have no memory adequately to name it—swept me. I rose hastily to my feet; as though to put a greater distance between us I moved backward, came upon a leather easy chair, sank into it, staring affrighted, fascinated at the body recumbent before me.

THE change was upon it. A glow had come to the ruddy pink flesh of the arms and legs, bared chest, throat and face. The pink was fading, replaced, not by the white pallor of bloodlessness but by a glow of silver. A mere sheen at first; but it grew into a dissolving glow seeming progressively to substitute light for the solidity of human flesh.

And then I gasped. My breath stopped. For behind that glowing, impassive face I saw the solid outlines of the mattress taking form, saw the mattress through the face, the chest, the body lying upon it.

Wilton's eyes were closed. They opened now, and his arm and hand with a wraith-like quality come upon them, were raised to a gesture. The signal. I would have stammered so to Bee, but already she had marked it and shut the current off. And very quietly, unhurried, she bent over and disconnected the wires, casting them aside.

The humming continued; so faint,

so rapid I might have fancied it was a weakness within my own ears. And presently it ceased.

Bee sat in the chair beside me. The body on the mattress was more than translucent now; transparent so that all the little tufts of the mattress-covering upon which it lay were more solidly visible than anything of the shadowy figure lying there. A shadow now; abruptly to my thought it was Wilton Grant no longer.

And then it moved. No single part of it; as a whole it sank gently downward, through the mattress, the floor, until a foot or so beneath, it came to rest. With realization my gaze turned across the room. The silent spectre was still there, standing beneath the floor, standing I realized, upon the same lower level where the shadow of Wilton Grant now was resting.

I turned back, saw Bee sitting beside me with white face staring at the mattress; and I heard myself murmur. "Is he all right do you think? He hasn't moved. Shouldn't he move? It's over now, isn't it?"

She did not answer. And then this wraith of Will did move. It seemed slowly to sit up; and then it was upright, wavering. I stared. Could I see the face of my friend? Could I mark this for the shadow of his familiar figure, garbed in that woven suit? It seemed so. And yet I think now that I was merely picturing my memory of him; for surely this thing wavering then before me was as formless, as indefinable, as elusive of detail as that other, hostile spectre across the room.

Hostile! It stood there, and then it too was moving. It seemed to sweep sidewise, then backward. Ah, backward! A thought came to me that perhaps now fear lay upon it. Backward, floating, walking or run-

ning I could not have told. But backward, beyond the walls, the house, smaller into the dimness of distance.

Was the shadow of Wilton Grant following it? I could not have said so. But it too was now beyond the room. Moving away, growing smaller, dimmer until at last I realized that I no longer saw it.

We were alone, Bee and I; alone to wait. The mattress at my feet was empty. I heard a sound. I turned. In the leather chair beside me Bee was sobbing softly to herself.

CHAPTER IV

THE RETURN

THE hours seemed very long. A singular desire for silence had fallen upon us. For myself, and it is my thought that the same emotion lay upon Bee, there were a myriad questions upon which idly I would have spoken. Yet of themselves so horrible, so fearsome seemed their import that to voice them would have been frightening beyond endurance.

Thus, we did not speak; save that at first I comforted Bee, clumsily as best I could, until at last she was calmer, smiling at me bravely, suggesting perhaps that I would sleep while she remained on watch.

The clock ticked off its measured passing of the minutes. An hour. Then midnight. The window shade was flapping again with the night wind outside. I rose to close the sash, but Bee checked me.

"He might want to come in that way. You understand, Rob—"

Memory came to me of the half-materialized spectre of that Kansas farmhouse, that apparition so ponderable of substance that it must per-

force escape by the opened window. I turned back to my chair.

"Of course, Bee. I had forgotten."

We spoke in hushed tones, as though unseen presences not to be disturbed were around us. Another hour. Throughout it all with half closed eyes I lay back at physical ease in my chair, regarding the white walls of our little room so empty. We still kept the single dull light; dull, but it was enough to illuminate the solid floor, that starkly empty mattress, the white ceiling, the four walls, closed door at my side, the two windows, one of gently flapping shade. And as musingly I stared the sense of how constricted was my vision grew upon me. I could see a few feet to one blank wall or another, or to the ceiling above, the floor below, but no further. Yet awhile ago, following the retreat of those white apparitions, my sight had penetrated beyond the narrow confines of this room into distances illimitable. And to me then came a vague conception of the vast mystery that lay unseen about us, unseen until peopled by things visible to which our sight might cling.

The realm of unthought things! Yet now I was struggling to think them. The realm of things unseen. Yet I had seen of them some little part. The wonder came to me then, were not perchance, unthought things non-existent until some mind had thought them, thus to bring them into being?

Two o'clock. Then three. Five hours. He had said he might return in five hours. I stirred in my chair, and at once Bee moved to regard me.

"He will be coming, soon," I said softly. "It is five hours, Bee."

"Yes, he will be coming soon," she answered.

Coming soon! Again I strove with tired eyes to strain my vision through those solid walls. He would be coming soon; I would see him, far in the distance which his very presence would open up to me.

And then I saw him! Straight before us. Beyond the wall, with unfathomable distances of emptiness around him. It might have been our light gleaming upon an unnoticed protuberance of the rough plaster of the wall, so small was it; but it was not, for it moved, grew larger, probably coming toward us.

Bee saw it. "He's there! See him, Rob!" Relief in her tone, so full to make it almost tearful; but apprehension as well, for to her as to me came the knowledge that it might not be he.

Breathless we watched; waited; and the white luminosity came forward. Larger, taking form until we both could swear it was the figure of a man. Lower now, beneath the level of our floor. It came, stopped before us almost within the confines of the room.

We were on our feet. Was it Wilton Grant? Was this his tall, spare figure—this luminous, elusive white shape at which I gaped? Did I see his shaggy hair? Was that his brief woven garment? I prayed that my imagination might not be tricking me.

Bee's agonized call rang out. "Will! Is this you, Will?"

WE STOOD together; she clung to me. The figure advanced, stood now quite within our walls. No longer wholly spectral, a cast of green had come to it; a first faint semblance of solidity. It stood motionless; drooping, as though tired and spent. Was it Wilton Grant? It moved again. It advanced, sank into

the floor as though sitting down—sitting almost in the center of the mattress, though a foot beneath it. Significant posture! It had come to the mattress from whence it had departed. It was Wilton Grant!

We bent down. Bee was on her knees. Now we could see details, clearly now beyond all possibility of error. Will's drawn face, haggard, with the luminosity every moment fading from it, the lines of opaque human flesh progressively taking form.

He was sitting upright, his hands bracing him against that unseen level below us. Then one of his hands came up, queerly as though he were dragging it, and rested on the higher level of the mattress. His eyes, still strangely luminous, were imploring us. And then his voice; a gasp; and a tone thin as air.

"Raise—me! Lift—me up!"

Bee's cry was a horror of self-reproach, and I knew then that she must have neglected the instructions he had given her. We touched him; gripped him gently. Beneath my fingers his half ponderable flesh seemed to melt so that I scarce dared press against it. We raised him. There was little weight to resist us; but as we held him, the weight grew. Progressively more rapidly; and within my fingers I could feel solidity coming.

Again he gasped, and now in a voice of human labored accents. "Put me—down. Now—try it, Bee."

We lowered him. The mattress held him. At once he sank back to full length, exhausted, distressed—but uninjured. Bee gave him a restorative to drink. He took it gratefully; and now, quite of human aspect once more, he lay quiet, resting.

Bee's arms went down to him.

"Will, you must go to sleep now—then you can tell us—"

"Sleep!" He sat up so abruptly it was startling; more strength had already come to him than I had realized. "Sleep!" He mocked the word; his gaze with feverish intensity alternated between us.

"Bee—Rob, this is no time for talk. . . . No, I'm all right—quite recovered. Listen to me, both of you. What I have been through—seen, felt—you could never understand unless you experienced it. No time for talk—I must go back!"

A wildness had come to him, but I could see that he was wholly rational for all that; a wildness, born of the ordeal through which he had passed.

"I must go back, at once. The danger impending to our world here—is real—far worse than we had feared. Impending momentarily—I had feared it—but now I know. And I must go back. With you—I want you two with me. You'll go, Bee. Rob, will you go? Will you, Rob?"

A sudden calmness had fallen upon Bee. "I'll go of course," she said quietly.

"Yes, of course. And you, Rob? Will you go with us? We need you."

Would I go? Into the unnameable, the shadows of unthought, unseen realms, to encounter—what? A rush of human fear surged over me; a trembling; a revulsion; a desire to escape, to ward off this horror crowded thus upon me. Would I go? I heard my own voice say strangely:

"Why—why yes, Will, I'll go."

Go! Leave this world!

And my voice was telling them calmly that I would go!

CHAPTER V

LAST PREPARATIONS

COMMITTED thus by my own quiet words, involuntarily spoken as though by a volition apart from me, I strove for calmness. A confusion of mind possessed me. But Bee was quite calm; and presently, though within me the surge of apprehension continued, outwardly I believed I did not show it.

Three of us going into the shadows. And Will said, not to linger this time in the Borderland, but to go on—to penetrate into the depths of the Unknown realm beyond. The very thought of it brought a score of anxious questions to my mind; but when I tried to voice them Will crisply checked me.

I realized now, with an emotion tinged by a faint whimsicality, that Will and Bee had summoned me here this evening with an anticipation of just this outcome. They had foreseen that we all three would make the trip together. They were prepared for it; and Will's first trial had been experimental wholly.

Thus, I found them ready. Two others of the knitted suits were at hand. Two other batteries. But we—Bee and I—had been seemingly indispensable in aiding Will. His departure—Bee had been by his side to remove the battery wires. And far more important, when it returned, his solidifying shadow had lain beneath the mattress. We had been there to raise him up, to hold him until the substance of his body was great enough for the mattress to sustain it. Suppose we had not raised him? Suppose while yet within the mattress space—or within the space

the floor of the room itself was occupying—the growing solidity of him had demanded empty space of its own? The thought brought a shudder—a thought too horrible to be dwelt upon.

During our brief preparations—which Will hurried with a grim haste—he did not once volunteer to explain his experience. And only once did Bee question him.

"You'll tell us exactly what we are to do?"

"Yes. Presently—before we start."

"You said there was need of haste? A real danger to our world here—from those—other beings?"

He was arranging the batteries. "Yes, Bee. A real danger."

"You think we can repulse them? Just three of us going in there? Strangers—"

Strangers indeed. No adventurers into other lands in all the dim pages of history could have felt, or been, such strangers.

He interrupted her. "We will do our best. It is necessary—our efforts. . . . We will have plenty of time for consultation, Bee. You will understand, when we are there. . . . Pour three glasses of water, Rob."

My fingers were trembling; it seemed strange that Bee could maintain such calmness. But it was simulated for she said:

"Will, is it—is it very horrible—the changing, I mean?"

He stopped before her, put his hands on her shoulders. His face, so set with its purpose he had forgotten the human feelings of her, softened momentarily with affection.

"No—it is strange—frightening at first. But not horrible. And you forget it soon. Then it's merely strange, awesome—you'll see—"

He broke off, turned away, and as momentarily his gaze touched me, he

smiled. "Awesome, Rob. But for me, this second time, it will be no great ordeal. Even exhilarating—strangely so. You'll see. . . . We're about ready, Bee."

She took her woven suit and retired. I was soon undressed and into mine. Its fabric was queerly light of weight, and for all its metallic quality it stretched readily, almost like rubber as I put it on. Somehow donning that garment made me shudder. It seemed unnaturally chill as it touched my skin.

Bee presently returned, garbed as we were. In spite of my perturbation, my fear of the dread experience which lay before me, I felt a thrill of admiration as I beheld her. So slim of figure, straight of limb, graceful; and with her grave, intelligent face full of one set purpose—to aid us in every way she could.

"We're ready," said Will briefly. "Here are your belts."

We fastened the broad belts about our waists. The pouches each contained some small object.

"Don't bother them now," Will objected, as I would have examined them. "Later, when we get—in there, will be time enough. . . . We're ready. What we are to do now is simple—I think there will be no mishap. We will seat ourselves on the mattress. You two may lie down; I shall sit up this time."

"Why?" I demanded.

HE SMILED. "It is only the first time one feels the sensations that they are disturbing. I'm confident of that. We will have the batteries beside us—" Bee was already placing them on the mattress. "At my signal, we will each disconnect our own. Should either of you be unable—to overcome—I will do it for you."

"But the coming back," I suggested. "We raised you up—"

His smile held a faint ironic amusement. "Don't you think, Rob, we can leave that to its proper time?" He saw my look and added, with the ready apology which made him so lovable:

"Naturally you are apprehensive. But I've planned for that, of course. There are many places where the level of this Borderland—as I call it—coincides exactly with the surface of our own realm. The back corner of the garden outside, for instance. I have remarked it—I can find it—when the time comes for us to return."

Bee said, "Will, I've been wondering—you were gone five or six hours. Were you in there very long?"

His smile was enigmatic. "You can have no conception of this experience—I cannot answer that, Bee—that's why I haven't told you anything—you are so soon to feel and see it for yourself." He was impatient for the start. "I think we're ready. There is so little to do—no chance to forget anything."

With sudden irrelevant thought my heart leaped. That hostile watching spectre . . . My anxious glance traveled the room. Bee said, "It's not here—I've been expecting—I'm so thankful it's not here."

It was not to be seen. I was relieved for that, at least. With a last deliberation we all three seated ourselves on the mattress. Will was between Bee and me. We connected the batteries; I held mine at my side, my nerveshaken fingers trembling, though inwardly I cursed them, fumbled at the switch to make sure I could control it. The pellets were in the palm of my other hand; the glass of water was within reach.

Will said earnestly, "One last

thing—and this is important—more important than you realize. Whatever comes, we must keep together. Remember that. You two—strive always to keep with me—close beside me. Whatever impulse you feel—fight it—do not yield to it. Remember you must stay by me."

The words themselves were simple to grasp. Yet beneath them lay a vague import, a suggestion of what was to come, which seemed unutterably sinister. I heard Bee murmuring.

"Yes, I understand."

I said, and marveled at the steadiness of my voice, "Very well, Will—I'll remember."

He said, "Now." I saw his hand go to his mouth. Now I must take the pellets. Within me a torrent of revulsion surged. I must take the pellets—at once. Bee was raising her glass of water. My hand went up; I felt the pellets in my mouth. Acrid. A faint acrid taste spread on my tongue. An then with a gulp of the water I had swallowed them. Breathless I waited, with heart thumping like a hammer, my head reeling, not from the pellets but from this excitement, fright, which swept me uncontrolled.

Will's voice said, "Rob. Your battery—switch it on."

My fingers found the little switch; pushed it. I felt a faint tingling of my limbs; a sudden nausea possessed me; my senses whirled; the room, which all at once had grown very sharp of outline, turned nearly black.

CHAPTER VI

THE MIND SET FREE

I DID not faint, and in a moment I felt better. My vision cleared; the room regained almost its normal aspect. But the

nausea persisted. I felt a desire to lie down. Will was sitting erect, but beyond him I saw Bee lying on her side, facing us. I reclined on one elbow, holding up my head that I might look around me.

The faintness was gone. The sweat of weakness was upon me, my forehead cold and clammy; but I could feel my heart beating strongly. When was the change to start? It seemed ages since I had taken those pellets.

Then I heard the hum. It sounded as though apart from me; but I knew it was not for I could feel it. A vibration. Not of my knitted suit; a vibration within me; within the very marrow of my bones.

My gaze was fixed upon the table across the room. Its outlines were very sharp and clear, unnaturally so, with that sharpness of detail which sometimes comes to the vision of one who is ill. Now they began to blur—an unsteadiness as though I were looking through waves of heat. Had the change started? I raised my hand, examined it. No change, save that the receding blood had made it a little pale.

The nausea was now leaving me. A sense of relief, of triumph that I was not ill, possessed me. With every alert faculty I determined to remark my sensations.

The vibration within me grew stronger, though to my ears it was unaltered. And then, abruptly the change began. My whole being was quivering. Not my muscles, my flesh, my nerves, but the very matter which composed them suddenly made sensible to my consciousness. The essence of me, trembling, quivering, vibrating—a tiny force, rapid beyond conception. It swept me with a tingling; grew stronger, possessed me until for a moment nothing of

my consciousness remained but the knowledge of it.

Frightening, horrible. But the horror passed. Again my brain and vision cleared. My whole being was humming; and then I realized that I could no longer hear the hum, merely felt it. The knowledge of sound not the sound itself. And an exhilaration was coming to me. A sense of lightness. My body growing lighter, less ponderable. But it was far more than that. An exhilaration of spirit, as though from me shackles of which I was newly conscious, were melting away. A lightness of being. A freedom . . . A new sense of freedom, frightening with the vague wild triumph it brought . . . Frightening too, for in the background of my mind was the realization that all my physical perceptions were dulling. My elbow was resting sharp against the rough mattress. I dragged my arm a trifle; and dull, far away as though detached from me, I could faintly feel it. I moved my leg. It was not numb. The reverse, it was thrilling in its every fibre. It moved, but I could only feel it move as in a dream. I even wondered if I felt it move at all. Was it not, perhaps, only my *knowledge* that it moved?

Abruptly I became aware that the table across the room had changed. My mental faculties, with all this morbid change of the physical taking place about them, were still alert. I had vaguely expected the table, the room, the visible, material objects of the realm I was leaving, to remain unaltered of aspect. But they did not. The table had lost its color; a monochrome of greyness possessed it. The table, the chairs, the whole room, had turned flat and grey. Flat of tone; and flat of dimensions as

well. The flat printed picture of a room.

But in a moment even that had changed. The grey outlines of the table were dim and blurred; the grey substance of it, no longer dull and opaque, seemed growing luminous. Faintly phosphorescent. Translucent, then transparent. Through the table leg, through the wavering grey image of the room-wall, I saw opening up to me the vast darkness of an abyss of distance. A phantom room in which I lay. The shadow of a room hovering in empty space.

THERE was no horror within me now. That thrilling sense of lightness, that vague unreasoning triumph of loosened shackles had no thought of horror; and to me came a faint contempt for this phantom room, these imponderable shadows which once had been solid chairs and walls.

Then I heard Will's voice. "The battery! Turn off your current, Rob!"

Heard his voice? I believe I barely heard it—physically a thin wraith of human voice striking my eardrums. Yet, mingled with that realization, was the sense that he was speaking quite normally. With my mind's ear, the *memory* of his normal voice made me hear his hurried, anxious admonition. "Turn off your battery. Rob! Rob!"

My battery. Of course, the moment had arrived when I must turn it off. I glanced down at it. A shadowy, unreal, phantom battery lying beside me; my grey hand resting upon it seemed to my vision far more ponderable. And then I received my first real perception as to the nature of this change. My fingers groped for the switch, found it. But this shadow battery, of which even

then I was dimly contemptuous, was solid beyond all solidity of which I had ever formed conception. My fingers fumbling with it—dulled as were my physical sensations. I could feel those fingers groping as though the adamant steel of that switch were *penetrating them*. A feeling indescribable—uncanny, morbidly horrible, though the incident was so brief the horror scarce had time to reach my confused consciousness. My fingers, not the battery, were shadow—half ponderable fingers, feeling their way *within the solid steel* of that tiny switch. For a terrifying instant I thought I could not move it. Then—it moved; the current was off. I sank back, exhausted of spirit with the effort. But at once Will's voice aroused me.

"Disconnect the wires. Can you do it, Rob? Quickly—or it will be too late."

I fumbled for the wires; cast them off—gigantic cables they might have been to the futile wraiths of my fingers. Will helped me, I think; and at last I was free, lying back upon the mattress. Dimly I could feel it beneath me, my thrilling, vibrating body resting upon it as though I were a feather newly drifted down.

Moments passed; I do not know how long, I could not have told for my thoughts were winging away unfettered, untrammelled as in a dream . . . A dream . . . the past, the present—all of it savoured of a vaguely pleasant unreality.

And presently I realized that I was moving; my body—could I indeed call this vanished consciousness of the physical, a body?—my *being* was floating, drifting gently downward, I could no longer feel the mattress; I saw it—a blurred, grey, transparent shadow, coming upward. Beside me, *within me*; then over me

as I sank through it a foot or two and came to rest.

Beneath me now, there was a dull sensation. I could feel myself lying upon something apparently solid. Feel it? The feeling was barely physical; rather was it a mere knowledge that I was lying there.

I tried to keep my scattering thoughts together. It was an effort to hold them—an effort to think coherently; an effort to cling to anything—even mental—of reality. I told myself that the change must be nearly complete. *I* was the spectre; this phantom mattress, this wraith of a room—those ghost-like chairs and table floating in space above me—that was my own real world, lost and gone.

A silence had fallen. The hum within me no longer sounded. It was a shock to see that little phantom clock; the movement of its pendulum was visible, but its ticking heart gave no sound. A preternatural silence hung like a grey shroud over a universe of shadows. Then I heard Will's *soundless voice*—heard it clearly now with the knowledge that it was wholly mental, a transference of thought which only my imagination and memory endowed with a familiar physical timbre.

"Rob. Come back to us! Hold your thoughts. Stay here with us."

And Bee's imploring voice, "We are here, Rob. All here together. Sit up—look at us—speak to us."

Was I indeed, nothing now but a mind? Were my thoughts all that remained of me? I fought for reality; for stability; fought for anything real that I could clutch, to which desperately I might cling. Where were Will and Bee? Somewhere here in the shadows. An abyss of shadows everywhere. I

thought I could see a thousand miles into that pregnant darkness. I could wander in it at will; my thoughts could wander everywhere.

But I must have conquered, for I found myself sitting up, with Bee and Will beside me.

"**T**HERE, that's better." I felt the relief in Will's tone. "Hold yourself firm—you'll be used to it in a moment. It's strange, isn't it?"

Strange; scarce have I words—and even those I choose are almost futile—to picture what I saw and felt. The world I had left lay all about me—dim, transparent shadows of familiar things. The room of Will's house—we were sitting just below the level of its floor. Around the room—above it, to one side of it—the phantom house itself was visible. Beyond the house, the gardens, the sombre ghosts of trees standing about—a shadowy semblance of the winding village street—other houses—a hill in the distance—

Mingled with all these shadows—the reality I had left—was the reality in which now I existed. The Borderland, we had been calling it. A vast realm of luminous darkness. A rolling slope upon which we were sitting—a slope, something newly tangible at least, which I could vaguely see and vaguely feel beneath me. A realm of pregnant darkness, filled with the shadows of the world I had left; and filled also with things as yet unseen—things as yet unthought . . . The realm of unthought things . . .

Will's voice seemed saying, "So strange—but you'll be used to it presently."

I turned to regard him and Bee—these spectres like myself, sitting beside me. What did I see? What

was their aspect to this new mind's eye which was mine? I cannot say. I think now that my intelligence saw the intelligence which was theirs, and clothed it out of habit with a semblance of substance for a body—familiar of outline and form since there was no other aspect I could conceive. I saw—or thought I saw, which perhaps is quite the same—luminous grey ghosts of my companions as last I had seen them. Of themselves they appeared not transparent. Through them the spectral walls of the room were not visible; of everything around me the bodies of my friends seemed the most real.

Will was smiling at me reassuringly. Bee's gaze was affectionate. Their voices, save that I knew I heard no sound, seemed not abnormal. I spoke. It was like thinking words with moving lips. But they heard me; not to read my lips, but to hear my thoughts. Heard with a result quite normal, for they nodded and smiled and answered me.

THEN Will touched me; experimentally with a smile, he laid his hand upon my arm. It was not unreal, save that only dimly, as though my senses were dulled, could I feel him. Yet there was a *weight* to his grip. His tenuous ghostly fingers (as I would have counted them in my former state) were not ghostly of grip to me now. His fingers, my arm, were identical of substance. His fingers could not occupy the space with me; they were ponderable, real, with a dulled reality which gave me at last something to cling to; brought my scattering thoughts together. I was here — Robert Manse; alive—living, breathing—sitting beside my friends. From that moment a measure of the strangeness left me and took to itself the

externals only. *I* was real; Bee and Will were real; it was only the things around us which were strange. The body which momentarily I seemed to have lost, was restored to me. A sense of the physical; dulled of perception, but still a body to house my mind. To house it—yet not to hold it firmly. A body which now was not a prison; shackles fallen away. Yet there was a danger to that. Already I had tasted of it—for the mind, too free, is difficult to control. I was saying, "I'm—all right . . . I was dreaming—I got confused."

Bee said whimsically, "We're here. Will, there is so much I want to ask you—"

"Not now, Bee." His voice was full of its old decisiveness. "We must start. Keep together—you understand now Rob, what I meant. Keep together — keep thinking, firmly, what you are doing. And do—what I do. We must start."

He drew himself erect. As though I were dreaming—or thinking of the act—I felt myself standing erect. Then walking—vaguely I could feel the substance of the slope beneath my feet—walking with a lightness, a lack of effort weird but pleasant. And I clung physically to Will, and saw Bee on his other side clinging to him also—as though a breath of wind might blow us all away.

The thought was whimsical. There could be no wind. Wind was moving air. I had the sense that I was still breathing, of course. But how could there be air? Air itself was infinitely more solid than these, our bodies. Yet I was breathing something. Call it air. The word of itself means nothing — and there are no words with which to clothe the realities of any unthought realm . . .

We were walking through the phantom room which had been the

reality of Will's home—through its wall—out through its garden. Our slope was rolling, uneven. The shadowy ground of the garden was above us, then below us; then, for a moment, we seemed standing exactly on its level. I remembered. This was the place Will had mentioned to which we could safely return.

We spoke seldom; Will did not seem to care to talk. I realized he knew where he was going—had some definite purpose in his mind. Alert now with every mental faculty, I wondered what it was, yet would not question him.

We stalked onward. The shadowy village lay about us, above us now. Soundless, colorless phantoms, these streets, trees and houses. I saw the railway station—the ghost of a train stood off there and then moved forward soundlessly. I was touched with a faint amusement to see it—a luminous ghost sliding along its narrow enslaving rails. It could not go up or down, or sideways. And it seemed so imponderable I would fearlessly have walked into it.

This Borderland, full of these shadows of our other world, yet seemed empty. Nothing of its own reality was visible. In every direction I could look into seemingly infinite distance; and overhead was a vast darkness—the emptiness of infinite space. Was nothing here with us in this Borderland? Those other spectres—those beings coming out from their world as we were coming in from ours? . . .

A thrill of quite normal excitement swept me at the thought. We had come in to encounter those spectres. And now they would be spectres no longer. Ponderable beings upon an equality with ourselves; and

we were here to thwart them of their purpose . . .

I heard Bee give a faint, alarmed cry. Ahead of us a shape had appeared! It became visible and I felt that perhaps it had been hiding behind some unseen obstacle. It stood, solid and grey, with the shadow of a barn, a haystack above and behind it. Stood directly in our path, as though waiting for us.

I pulled at Will, but he ignored me. Hastened his pace.

We stalked forward with that waiting thing standing immobile in our path!

CHAPTER VII

THE STRUGGLE AT THE BORDERLAND

THE thing stood waiting as Will drew us toward it. Fear swept over me. Yet the very sense of fear brought with it a reassurance, for it was the physical I feared; the vanished sense of my body was not entirely gone, for now I was fearing its welfare.

My voice protested, "Will. Wait. That thing there—"

"It is friendly, Rob."

The fear died. I remembered what now seemed obvious; Will had been leading us somewhere with a set purpose. To meet this friendly thing, of course; this thing which doubtless he had met before. I stared at it as we approached. A dim, opaque grey shape like ourselves; but it seemed formless, sexless; neither human nor unhuman—a shape merely—a something poised there of which my mind seemed able to form no conception. Then I heard Will say to Bee:

"A girl, Bee—you understand—Rob, listen. We must cling to the realities of our world. There are no

other words—no other conceptions—with which we can think these unthought things. This is a girl——”

I thought it was a girl; and at once I fancied that I could distinguish her. Standing there with a phantom barn and haystack of our own world above and behind her. A girl like Bee. I could see the grey-formed outlines of her; vaguely flowing draperies; long hair; a face of human beauty with a queer wistful look—she was smiling at Will—a friendly smile—.

All this I thought I saw; and in the thinking, brought it to reality. Into my mind then flashed a clearer understanding. This Borderland—and the other inner realm lying beyond it which soon we were to enter—could no more be compared to the world we had left than an apple can be added to an orange. The very essence of every thought we now were thinking was different—incomparable. Yet within our minds was some lingering, unchangeable quality—call it Ego; so that these new things must be clothed in the fashion of the old.

My words grow futile? I can only say then that this first encountered being seemed like a girl, wistful of face; grey, colorless of aspect; yet solid—as solid as ourselves which every moment was seeming a more normal solidity.

Will touched her. “Rob—Bee—this is Ala—she has been waiting for us.”

Her voice said, “I am Ala who will do what I can to help you.”

The tone seemed soft, liquid, musical and wholly feminine. Soundless words but clearly intoned as though I had heard them with a physical ear.

Bee said, “Why she speaks English.”

It struck a note of whimsicality; the thought momentarily relieved the tension under which I was laboring. And so I think it was with the others; they were smiling; but Will’s smile faded as he turned to us.

“You must keep on thinking things like that. Cling always to normality.” His voice was earnest. “You also, Ala—English you see, is our language.”

“But you are speaking my language,” she said gravely.

“Of course,” he agreed hurriedly. “Do not doubt it. All of you—I think I understand best of us all. We must strive for our accustomed normality. Remember—the mind now is nearly everything.”

“I am—not really confused,” I said.

It relieved him; he spoke more quietly. “This girl, Ala, came from her own realm—wandered out here to see and feel for herself what madness was possessing her people.”

“IT IS strange,” Ala said abruptly. “I am frightened—” Sudden terror marked her features. I was standing nearest to her and her hand gripped me. Again I felt that solidity. Normality. I was real; I laughed contemptuously at all these shadows. The girl added anxiously:

“Cannot we go back? Now—where all is real—not like this. I—cannot stay here much longer.”

“We will go,” said Will. “Bee—and you Rob—listen carefully. From now on it is a question of the power of our minds—our will-power. If you wander—weaken for a moment—we are lost. Keep thinking, I am here with my friends. We are going together—going into the other realm.” He swung to the girl. “You, Ala, for you it is easier. But yield yourself slowly. If you withdraw

resistance you will rust beyond us. You understand? Above everything else we must keep together."

She nodded.

We clung to each other. Ala began moving forward, drawing us onward up that empty Borderland slope which now was steeply inclined. We passed through the haystack—a mere shadow; passed upward through a corner of the barn roof.

Beneath us now spread the phantom world we had left. But as my thoughts dwelt on what we were going to do, the shadows of our earthly realm seemed fading; growing dimmer, blurring as though about to vanish. I watched them fearfully; when they were gone I would be in darkness — pregnant darkness thronged with things unseeable. I thought vehemently.

"We must keep together—we are going on into that other realm, Will says we are—Will says we must keep together."

But my thought strayed. I remembered Will's house; the room we had left—the little clock—Why, I fancied I almost saw it. Was I there, back in that room?—Where was Bee?—Bee?—

I must have called her name in my thoughts, and at once she answered.

"Here Rob. Right here." And I felt the pressure of her hand.

A struggle of the mind. I knew then that every quality of mind inherent to me was winging backward: tugging, pulling, but I fought against it. And I became aware too of a different struggle within me. I had sensed it for some time past but now it sprang into keen intensity. A struggle of the physical. A vague racking pain possessed me. Dull, detached seemingly from my consciousness, yet I knew it was the pain of my body. It grew sharper. Not in-

tolerable; but frightening with a sense of horror. It permeated my every fiber; tingling with infinitely tiny needles; and tugging, physically as my mind was tugging, to resume its original state. Like a chip in an undertow I was being drawn backward . . .

"Now." I felt Will's tense voice. And Ala's soft words.

"We—are—passed. Hold me—now."

Someone was clutching my arm. I seemed floating, storm-tossed — a feather blown in a wind I could not feel. But abruptly the struggle ceased; vaguely I was conscious that my feet were standing upon something solid—Will and Bee were here—Ala was here—I was a reality once more, and there were rational thoughts to think and real things to see.

CHAPTER VIII

THE REALM OF NEW DIMENSIONS

THE shadows of our world were vanished. The Borderland, with its darkness, its drab empty slope, was gone. A new world lay spread about me; new companions. And I was conscious of a new entity — a new Robert Manse, who was myself.

I remember now that my first thought was surprise that I should be able to visualize things of strangeness. But now I know that once over the Borderland my *mind* itself had changed, yet retaining of its old self just enough, so that I might be conscious of the strangeness. In a grey half-light of luminosity seemingly inherent to everything, I found myself standing upon a hillside, gazing down an empty slope of greyness.

Was it land? I can only say that it seemed solid beneath me; solid, quivering with a tiny tremble; vibrating, and within itself vaguely luminous.

Overhead was darkness. Yet hardly that, for the same luminosity was there; and I felt that I was gazing, not through emptiness but rather through some tenuous fluid illimitable to my vision, with things there to see, as yet—for me—unseeable.

The slope before me was empty. But shapes were materializing; it was as though I had come out of the darkness, with eyes not yet accustomed to the light. I fancied I saw water in the distance. A white lake; but when I stared, it seemed more like a grey rolling cloud. Was it liquid? . . .

The mind receives a multitude of impressions in an instant. I was conscious of myself. My body was an entity wholly vague—yet there seemed a tingling in it; a *weight* to it, for I was standing upright. Will and Bee—and the girl Ala—were beside me. I saw them now in their old familiar form, but with a queer sense of *flatness* to them. Flat; unnatural of outline; not grotesque, merely strange, unreal. Almost indescribable; and though distinctly it was not a two-dimensional aspect, I think that *flatness* best describes it. A something about them which was lacking; or perhaps a something added—I do not know.

And inherent to this whole realm as soon I was to see it, was this same queer flatness. Things without *depth*; yet to view them sidewise, the depth was there, with the flatness still persisting.

And I saw color; nameless colors which I might call blue, or red, or green and the words would have no meaning. Men, women—houses, or

at least habitations; the words are all I can command, but they are grotesquely meaningless. It was all so incomparably strange; and paradoxically, the strangest of it all was the fashion in which my mind began to accept it. I could think of Ala as nothing but a girl. A frightened, likable girl—with thoughts and feelings similar to my own. This realm was real—a new country; with friends, enemies—a struggle going on within it in which I must play a part. The whole seen and thought of in terms of my own world. And I realized that I—to these others of this other realm—must have seemed a stranger, but not so very strange. Thought of by them in their own terms—each of us upon a common ground, an equality of material state, to visualize the other in terms of ourselves.

CHAPTER IX

THE ATTACK ON THE MEETING HOUSE

ALA was saying, "At last—it is so good to be back." For her the struggle was wholly past; she was smiling, relieved, and upon her face there was solicitude for us. "You are not injured? At rest—now?"

"Yes," said Will. "It is over." His hand touched Bee affectionately. "The strangeness will soon be gone, I think. You all right, Rob?"

"Yes," I said. In truth, every moment a rationality of being was coming to me. And curiosity, of itself evidence of normality, made me ask. "Where are we going? What are we going to do?"

"Going with Ala," said Will briefly. "Her people are friendly to us

—deploring the threatened invasion of our world.”

I realized that he and Ala at their first meeting must have exchanged knowledge, and planned what we now were to do.

Bee asked, “Are we going far? Will it take long?”

Ala seemed puzzled. “Far”—“long.” The words involved Space and Time. I saw that at first they had no meaning to her.

“We are going there,” she answered. Her gesture was vaguely downward ahead of us. “Come,” she added.

We started. My impression now is that we were walking. I could feel a part of my body in movement, quite as though of my volition I were moving my legs. A sense of lightness again possessed me; a lack of stability. But I could feel solidity beneath me, and I was moving upon it.

We walked then, down the hill. There was vegetation; things, let me say, seemed rooted within the ground. But they bent from our advance as though with a knowledge and a fear that we might tread upon them.

The scene was no longer empty. A rolling land, with what might have been a mountain range rising in the distance. All in that half-light of seeming phosphorescence. I noticed now that the familiar convexity of earth was gone. The scene had a queer concavity; to the limit of my vision it stretched *upward*; as though we were upon the inner surface of some vast hollow globe with the concave darkness overhead coming down to meet it. A hollow globe within which we were standing; but it seemed of infinite size.

Not far away now was that region which first I thought was water. We

passed over it—partly through it. I felt the resistance against me. Like water with no wetness; but to my sight it was a heavy fog lying upon the land. Its breath was oppressive; I was glad when we were past it, emerging again into the twilight with a city before us.

A city! Houses—human habitations! I knew it—divined it with a new mental alertness; and Ala’s words presently confirmed my thoughts.

“Our Big-City,” she said.

BEFORE us lay an area upon which was spread a confusion of globes. Circular, yet visually flat of depth. In size I found them later to be, from the smallest some twice my own height, to others I would in my own world have said to be a hundred feet in diameter. Opaque grey globes, of a material unnameable. Of every size they lay seemingly strewn about; and in places piled one upon the other. All of grey color that glistened with a sheen of iridescence.

The Big-City. Diminished by distance it seemed indeed as though a thousand varying-sized soap-bubbles, smoke-filled, lay piled together. And the whole flattened, queerly unnatural like a picture with a wrong perspective.

The globes were scattered about; but as we approached I saw open spaces twisting among them like tortuous streets. Horizontal streets; and vertical streets as well. Abruptly I realized that this realm was not cast like my own upon a single plane. On earth we move chiefly in a world of two dimensions—only in the air or water do we have the freedom of three. Here, the vertical and the horizontal seemed no different.

Bee said, “The Big-City. Houses—”

Her voice trailed away into wonderment. From our presently nearer viewpoint, movement showed in the city; beings—people like ourselves—moving about the streets. And soon we were among the globes—within the city.

I say "soon." I can remember no conception of time, save in terms of the events within my ken. How *long* it was from our crossing the borderline until we reached the city I do not know—we moved, walked and entered the city. How far we walked—that too I do not know.

The people we passed did not heed us; the globes, from whatever angle we viewed them were circular, seemingly flat, but always flat in the unseen dimension. We passed close to one. It appeared solid. It had no apertures—no doors nor windows. A man went by us—a shape in the guise of a man; and he entered the globe by passing through it. It yielded to his passage; its substance closed after him, opaque, sleek, glistening as before.

We stopped at a globe of larger size. Ala said, "I will leave you here. And when I come back—we will go together to the meeting place. They are waiting for you."

Will nodded. "Very well, Ala. How long before you come?"

Again she was puzzled. "How long? Why, I will come."

She left us; I did not see how or where she went.

Will said, "Come on. This is our house they have given us."

Together we passed through the side of the globe. I felt almost nothing—as though I had brushed against something, no more. Were the globes of a material solidity? I do not know.

Within the globe was a hollow interior. Call it a room. The same

luminous twilight illumined it. A room of circular concavity. No walls, no ceiling; it was all floor. We walked upon it and though we had passed through it, nevertheless it sustained us; and in every position beneath us seemed the floor, above us the ceiling. A memory of the vanished gravity of our earth came to me. The word—the conception—had no meaning here. Yet we had *weight*; the substance upon which we rested attracted us perhaps. I cannot say.

We gazed around us. There were places of rest—rectangles of a misty white into one of which I found myself instinctively reclining as though with a need of physical quiet. A sense of ease came to me; but it was only vaguely of the physical. I was indeed now barely conscious of a body; but of my mind I was increasingly aware. I could be tired in mind. I was, and I was resting.

WILL and Bee were resting also. I saw upon Bee's face that same queer, wistful expression which had marked Ala's; I saw her regarding me intently; and I answered her affectionate smile.

Will said, "The strangeness is leaving us. I'm tired—I wish I did not have to talk, but I feel that I should."

He told us then what he had learned from Ala. This Big-City was the most populous place of the realm. Ala's parent—I might say her father, to make the term more specific—was leader of the Big-City people. One among them—one whom they called Brutar—had found a way to get into the Borderland. He had gone there—and I think that it was he whom we termed the first of the ghosts—whom we had seen that night on the little Vermont farm. He had re-

turned, with tales of an outer world . . . tales of the consciousness of a different body . . . a physical being with pleasures unimagined. . . .

The craze to follow him spread. An element undesirable among the people seemed most inspired to join him.

"Ala told me little more than that," Will went on. "The method they are using to get to the Borderland—I do not yet know. But I know that this Brutar—he would sweep with his followers into our world. Physically possessed, in a fashion they could not understand. . . ."

He stopped with the sentence unfinished; it left me with a memory of that Kansas farm-house, and of the young girl who had died of fright.

Bee asked, "What do they call themselves — these people? This race—beings—" She floundered. "There are no words, yet I have so much to ask."

He shook his head. "All that we have to learn. There is a civilization here—a mental existence in which we'll soon be taking a rational part. For myself, it is less strange every moment."

I nodded. "And Ala's people—they refuse to join in this invasion of our world?"

"Yes," he said. "They deplore it—they're trying to stop it. A meeting is to be held—Ala is coming to take us to it."

I drifted off into a reverie; and Ala came. I glanced up to see her beside us.

"If you are ready," she said, "we will go."

Again we passed through the enveloping globe which was our home: passed along the city street. It was now deserted. We walked on its level surface; it wound and twisted its way between the globes. At times a

group of them piled one upon the other — the smallest on top like a disarray of bubbles—obstructed the street. But the substance upon which we walked (it was often barely visible) turned upward; a sharp upward curve to the vertical; then straight up, again leveling off, and then downward. We trod it; with no more effort going up than upon the horizontal. It seemed, indeed, only as though the scene about us had shifted its plane.

In silence we proceeded. I wondered where the inhabitants of the place might be. Then I saw a few. Not walking openly, these few we now encountered; one I saw lurking in the curve between two adjacent globes. A man . . . robed darkly . . . a dark hood seemingly over his head . . . like a shroud enveloping him to mingle his outline with the darkness . . . Darkness? Had the twilight turned to night? . . . Was this the Borderland again? . . . I seemed to see its darkness . . . I strained my vision for the familiar shadows of our own world . . . Was that a tree? . . . A street? . . . Was that Will's house over there? . . .

Bee's agonized voice reached my consciousness. "Rob! Rob dear, come back to us!"

My mind had wandered, and had drawn with it the tenuous wraith of a body it so easily dominated. I fought myself back. Told myself vehemently I was *not* in the Borderland; I was with my friends. With Will—Bee; with Ala.

I SAW them, distantly; with Space I know not how much, nor Time, how long—between us. Saw them; saw Bee with horrified arms held out as though to bring me back. And felt myself whirling in Nothingness.

"Rob! Rob!"

"Yes," I called. "I'm here—coming." And at last again I was with them.

"You're careless, Rob." Concern mingled with the relief in Will's tone. "Careless — you must not wander that way."

Ala said quietly. "There are many like that. A wandering mind brings evil to the body it tosses about."

"But with us now, it is additionally hard," Will said. "Every instinct within us draws us away—as it was with you, Ala, in the Borderland."

"Yes," she agreed. "I know that."

We continued our passage toward the meetinghouse. That shrouded shape I had seen was not of my wandering fancy, for now I saw others. Peering at us from dark spaces; eyes that glowed unblinking; or shapes of mantled black skulking furtively along the streets. Avoiding us, yet always watching as we boldly passed.

"Brutars," Ala said. "Those who with Brutar would attack your world. They are everywhere now about the city. I am afraid of them."

We came upon the meetinghouse. It was a tremendous globe, in outward aspect no different from the others save that its size was gigantic. As we neared it I saw that upon its luminous grey surface were narrow circular bands of a lighter color—bands both vertical and horizontal. These also I had noticed on most of the other globes; a lighter color in bands, or sometimes in small patches. I questioned Ala; the lighter-colored parts were where one might safely enter, thus not to encounter the occupants, or the furnishings within.

We passed through one of the bands of the gigantic globe, and found ourselves in a single great room. A globular amphitheatre; to use earthly measurements it had per-

haps a thousand feet of interior diameter. Its entire inner surface was thronged with grey-white shapes of people, save where, like aisles, the space of the outer bands divided them into segments.

The segments were jammed; the people seemed crouching upon low pedestals one close against the other. A few of the pedestals were vacant. None where we entered, and the nearest I saw were almost above us. We passed along an aisle to reach them. The globe and everyone in it appeared slowly turning over, so that always we seemed to be at its bottom with those opposite to us over our heads.

At last we were seated. In the center of the globe, suspended there in space by what means I could not know, was a ball some fifty feet in diameter. Upon it men were sitting. Dignitaries; leaders of the people facing from every angle the waiting throng. And one—a man of great stature—Ala's father, walking around the ball restlessly, awaiting the moment when he would begin his address.

A silence hung over everything. Again I was reminded of the utter soundlessness of this realm. I felt the suppressed murmurs of the people—but I know no physical sounds were audible. Nor indeed, had I ear-drums with which to hear them had such sounds existed.

Time passed as we found our seats. Immobile we sat; and for me at least, time ceased to exist.

Then Ala's father spoke. "My people — danger has come to a strange race of friendly neighboring beings. And it brings a danger also to us all—to you, to me——"

He stopped abruptly. I felt a sound; a myriad sounds everywhere about us. Shouts of menace; a

swishing, queerly aerial sound as of many rapidly moving bodies.

Through all the aisles of the globe, from outside, the shapes of men were bursting. Swishing through the opaque surface of the globe, entering among us, whirling inward. Like storm tossed feathers they whirled, end over end, uncontrolled with the power of their rush. A cloud of hostile grey shapes in the fashion of menacing men come to attack us!

CHAPTER X

CAPTURED BY THOUGHTS MA- LEVOLENT

AS THE followers of Brutar burst into the globular amphitheatre with shouts of menace, a confusion—a chaos—a panic descended upon the gathering. Everywhere the people were rising to flight; struggling to escape, struggling with each other, aimlessly, unreasonably, with scarce the steady thought to distinguish friend from foe. The stools upon which we had been sitting were overturned; the floor around me, and above me was grey with its surging occupants; they were floating inward, struggling groups of them; the air soon was full of them, like feathers tossed in a breeze. I could feel the breeze now—a turgid motion of that imponderable, invisible fluid for which I have no other name save air; a breeze caused by the fluttering things which were ourselves.

It seemed—as the idea came to me from some dim recess of that other mind which had been mine—it seemed an aimless struggle. I was clutched by a dozen groping hands—pressed by half as many bodies. I saw them—indistinguishable as they

rocked against me; and felt them dimly. I fought back, clutched at emptiness; or caught something solid. Pushed it violently away, to see it float off, and feel myself drift backward from the recoil of my blow, the physical futilely struggling with its own tangibility.

A whirling gray shape, definitely outlined in the fashion of a burly man, bore down upon me. It halted, gathered its poise and confronted me. A length away, with empty space between us, it stood motionless. Brutar! Recognition came to me; and I knew then that this was the shape they had termed the first of the ghosts—that spectre we had seen on the bank of the little creek in Vermont. Brutar—he who was leader of these invaders we had come to check. The desire shot through me to attack him now; to kill him.

I plunged; but as though I had leaped into some unseen entangling veil I was halted; pushed backward until again I found myself facing him. He had not moved. With folded arms he stood regarding me. I stared into his eyes. They were glowing, smouldering torches. A wave of something almost tangible was coming from them; and abruptly I knew that it was his thoughts in a wave so ponderable I could not force my body against it. I could feel it, this wave; feel these thoughts, malevolent, commanding, compelling, as they beat against me.

He spoke. "You need not try to move. You cannot, except as I would have you move."

The words seemed inherent to all the space about me; it was almost as though the words themselves were ponderable; but it was the thought of them—his thought of them—which like a net had me entangled. I struggled, if not to advance, then to

retreat. I could do neither. The wave had coiled about me. Matter of a tangibility almost equal to that of my own body, it held me enmeshed. Yielding as I fought with it, but holding me as a delicate net will hold a struggling fish.

He spoke again. "Be still—both of you."

Both of us! I became aware that Bee was beside me. Floundering, swept inward toward me, to grip me at last and cling.

"Bee! Bee, dear."

"Rob! It's you! I'm so glad. I tried—I can't get away. I'm entangled—it's all around me. Both of us—we can't get away."

I had no coherent thought remaining, save relief that Bee was with me. I tried to think that I must escape—must kill this Brutar. Like an echo, as though I had shouted them aloud, the thoughts rebounded to beat against my brain with a pain almost physical. I could not think them again. A wall was around me reflecting them back—distorted, agonized echoes, impotent to pass the barrier. And I thought, "I must kill—I—I am glad Bee is with me. Everything is all right—Bee is with me." And yielded, to stand there helplessly clinging to her.

Around us—beyond Brutar's entangling engulfing whirl of thought—I perceived a dim vision of struggling shapes and confused sound. Far away—very far away—far away in distance—in Space; and in time as well—Why of course—that struggle in the meeting house was in the Past—We were there no longer, either in Space or Time—That struggle in the meeting house had been, but it was not now.—

Bee was still clinging to me. Like submerged swimmers sucked away in an undertow, we swirled within that

enveloping thought-wave. Brutar was near us. I could see him—see the grey hovering shape of him. Darkness was everywhere. Solidity gone, save the press of those hostile thoughts and the blessed tangibility of Bee within the hollow of my protecting arm.

A chaos of moving darkness. Or was it that the darkness was immobile and ourselves rushing through it? A chaos of things which I could not see; thoughts which I tried to think, but could not. Thoughts rushing past me; entities invisible, uncapturable.

For what length of Time or Space I do not know, Bee and I whirled onward through that dark mental chaos—imprisoned, with our captor leading us.

CHAPTER XI

THE UNIVERSE OF THOUGHT

I SHALL revert now to Will's experience during that attack upon the meeting house as he later described it to me. He had been crouching near Ala. When the hostile shapes burst in, he clung to her. Will was more alert than I to the conditions of this strange existence. He gave no thought to a physical violence; he knew it was the mental struggle which was to be feared; and he kept his mind alert, aggressive to attack.

Ala too, was of help. He heard her murmuring, "Be very careful. Let no evil thought-waves engulf us."

A shape whirled up—a leering man. But Will's thoughts were stronger. The waves clashed with a visible front of conflict; a faint glow of luminous black, in a very palpable heat. The shape cowered, retreated, slunk away.

Everywhere the struggle was proceeding. Upon the center ball Ala's father stood, and with roaring voice and a will more defiant than any within the globe, he strove to quell the invaders. Beat them back. Some retreated; some fell, lying crumpled and inert. Dead? We may call them so. Bodies unharmed. Minds driven into darkness; driven away, to leave an empty shell behind them. Soon the confusion was over. The amphitheater was strewn with mindless bodies; the dead—never to move again, and others, injured; minds unhinged—irrationally wandering, to return, some of them, to reach again their accustomed abode.

Ala's father—they called him Thone—found his daughter with Will; took Will to his home, where for a nameless time they were together, exchanging friendly thoughts that each might know what manner of world was his friend's. To Will it was the first rationality of this new realm. They reclined within a globe of luxurious fittings which gave a sense of peace, luxury, well-being of the mind, derived by what means Will could not say. He only was aware that Ala was beside him, her father facing them.

He had thought of Bee and of me with fear—had wondered where we were, had wished we were with him. But Thone had told him not to be afraid. It was so easy to wander. We had not come to harm within the meeting house. We would presently come back, or if we did not, he would send out and find us.

The interior of the globe was vaguely luminous. Thone said, "We would perhaps be more comfortable if we could see outside." He murmured words—commands spoken aloud; and a shell of the globe in a patch above them slowly seemed

to dissolve—or at least become transparent, so that they saw through it a vista of the city of globes—a city lying then in the vertical plane with the black void of darkness to one side.

THONE was a grave man of dominant aspect; eyes from which shone a power of mind unmistakable. He listened silently while Will tried to describe our Earthly existence. Occasionally he would question, smiling his doubts. At last he said, "It seems very queer to have the mind so enchained by its body."

Then Thone spoke of his own realm. "We Egos—" The word struck upon Will's consciousness with an aptness startling. Egos! Why, of course. These were not people. He—himself—was no longer a man; an Ego, little more.

"We Egos live so different a life. It is nearly all mental. This body—" He struck himself. "It is negligible."

Soon they were plunged into scientific discussion, for only by an attempt at comparison in terms of science could Will hope to grasp the elements of this new material universe. He said so, frankly; and Thone at once acquiesced.

"I will try," he smiled, "to tell you the essence of all we know of—shall we call it the construction of this universe of ours? All we know. My friend, it is only the wise man who knows how little is his knowledge."

"Our world then is a void of Space and Time. The Space of itself is Nothingness, illimitable. Yet to our consciousness it has a shape, a curvature, like this that is around us now." He indicated the hollow interior of the globe. "To traverse it in a single direction, one always tends to return."

Will said: "A globular void of

Space. I can understand that. But how big is it?"

"There is no answer to such a question," Thone replied gravely. "To our material existence, our consciousness, it is a finite area, yet within it some of us may go further than others. A mind unhinged takes its body very far—or so we believe—and yet sometimes returns safely. A mind departed from its physical shell which it then leaves behind—is gone forever. Yet that too, is illogical, for traversing a curved path such as ours—however slight may be the curve—one must eventually return. And out of this we have built a theory that such a mind—or as we call it, an Ego—untrammelled—will return sometime to take a new body. But I must not confuse you with mere theories when there is so much of fact which is confusing enough no doubt."

"That's not confusing," said Will. "We likewise have such a theory—we call it reincarnation."

Thone went on: "We have then, a void of curved Space. Within it exist Thoughts; material entities persisting in Space for a length of Time. Thus Time is brought into our Universe; but not Time as you have described it to me. Ours, like yours, is the measure of distance between two or more events. But the distance is very dimly perceived by our senses."

"Wait," said Will, "Before you discuss Time, let me understand the other. All your material entities are Thoughts? That is incomprehensible to me."

Thone deliberated. "I suppose that is natural," he declared at last. "Your substance—as it appears to you—has a greater solidity than the substance of your mentality."

IT WAS Will's turn to smile. "The latter, with us, has no substance at all. The human mind—as distinct from our physical brain—is wholly intangible. And it is one of the things we know least about."

"Perhaps that is why it seems so unsubstantial," Thone retorted. "At all events, with us mind-qualities are the basic substance out of which all matter is built. A variety of qualities, which vary the resultant product, be it an Ego, or a thing inert, all are from the same source—a thought."

A Universe built from a Thought! Yet to Will then came the realization that our realm is of an essence equally unsubstantial—our own matter—rock, metal, living organisms, what are they of their essence save a mere vortex, a whirlpool of Nothingness?

A question came to Will; and even as he asked it, he knew its answer. "Your Universe built from a Thought? Whose thought? You start with Nothing, yet you presuppose the existence of a Mind to think that thought."

"A Mind All-Knowing," Thone answered very slowly. "A mind Omniscient. Have you not spoken of your own belief in such a mind? We call it our Creator-Mind—as quite literally it is."

Will said, "Of itself; that is not concrete to me who am in a measure of scientific reasoning."

Thone said warmly, "That is where you of your Earth—as you call it—are wholly mistaken. And indeed, I begin to see where there is not so much difference between your world and mine as we suppose. Let us assume we have the same Creator, his thought to bring us and all that we call our Universe into being."

"Granted," said Will. "But there

the similarity ends. You start with a Thought? We start—"

"With what?" Thone demanded.

"Scientifically speaking," Will answered lamely, "we have no beginning. At least, we have not yet been able to explain it."

"We then are more logical than you," Ala put in with a gentle smile.

"Perhaps," agreed Will. "But you cannot connect your Thought with your Science—or at least you have not, to me as yet."

"But I will," declared Thone. "We take this Thought and find it to be a vibration of Nothingness. Of what is your basic substance composed?"

"The same," said Will.

"Quite naturally. We are then of a similar origin—constructed only to a different result. Our substance, in its final state, remains to our consciousness a vibration of Thought. It is quite tangible. Let me show you. Touch me—your hand feels me? That is the physical—cohesive Thought—matter, persisting in Space and Time throughout my existence. Distinct from that, there is my material—mentality. It also persists in Space and Time, but to a lesser degree. More transitory. More varied in its outward qualities, since I can fling out thought—vibrations of good or ill—or many kinds and types.

"Understand me, my friend. This is Matter of temporary duration which I can create myself at will. Or—in terms of your own realm, if you prefer—I can set into vibration, into motion, intangible matter already existing, and by its very motion bring it to tangibility. Can you understand that?"

"**Y**ES," agreed Will readily. "And you surprise me with constant similarities to my own world. We believe our own thoughts to be vi-

brations of some substance intangible. And when you speak of creating an appearance of substance by imparting motion to something otherwise unsubstantial, that too we see in our world. Water is a fluid. A stream of water slowly flowing from a pipe offers no solidity to a blow from a rod of iron. But if that water comes from the pipe with a swift enough motion, a blow struck against the jet with an iron bar seems to be repulsed.

"That seems not actually the creation of new matter, but we have another effect which is this. A tiny rod of steel—a needle the length of my finger—may hang motionless balanced upon a pivot. It is a material body which we would call three or four inches long, by one-hundredth of an inch thick and broad. We set it swinging—vibrating—whirling in a circle with the pivoted end as the center. With a swift enough movement that circle is impenetrable. In effect, out of that needle, we have created a steel disc, one-hundredth of an inch thick, with a diameter of say eight inches. An area of material substance hundreds of times greater than the needle—yet the mass is not increased."

"Quite so," Thone agreed. "Our thought-waves have a mass infinitesimal. But like your steel disc, they can momentarily become very tangible to our Ego-senses. A tangibility very different, yet comparable to our bodies themselves. Less mass, yet more power. Under some circumstances they may alter an inert substance, as I have made transparent to our vision that segment of the globe over there, beyond which we see the city. Or they can enmesh a material organism—your body, for instance—I had meant to demonstrate that."

He moved away from Will, stood quiet; and about Will he flung his wave of thoughts, so that Will was drawn irresistibly to him—as Bee and I were even then enmeshed by Brutar's thought-substance.

Thone laughed. The net of his thoughts dissolved. "You see? It is a very tangible substance. Yet elusive as well. We understand partially its uses. Yet only partially. Its nature is varied from a tenuity impalpable, to the physical substances which form the entities of our universe. Like that thing you described as your Light-waves, our Thought-substance can traverse Space with tremendous velocity. Not a finite, measurable velocity, as with your Light, but with a speed infinitely rapid.

"A thought may travel to infinity and back in an instant. That—understand me—relates only to its most tenuous form, impalpable to our physical senses—perceived only dimly and only occasionally by a mind other than that from which it originates. In more solid forms its velocity is slower. But it is all under control of our Ego-will power. Do I confuse you?"

"A little," Will admitted. "I am trying to hold a clear conception of it all. I understand you have a void of Space. Must it not be filled with something besides these Thought-entities? Some all-pervading, impalpable fluid?"

"**WE** DO not know," said Thone frankly. "There are emanations from our immobile organisms. Thus we breathe and eat—the substance of our bodies is renewed—but of that I shall tell you more at another time. You were saying—"

Will went on: "This realm then is

filled with your material bodies. This globe we are in—the globes that make your city—the Ego which is you—and myself—other Egos like us—What holds us where we are?" He smiled. "I'm groping, I'm trying to say, is there no gravitation? No gigantic material body holding us where we are: Out there in the open—" He gestured. "We walked upon something. A surface—a slope. What is it?"

"You ask me many questions at once," Thone replied quietly. "Gravitation, as you call it—yes, with us it is the inherent desire of every particle of thought-matter to cling to its fellows. Thus everything of substantiality tends to cluster at the center of the void. Only motion enables it to depart, which is why it must always move in a curved path—a balancing of the two conflicting forces.

"You question me about some gigantic material substance—like your Earth. There is none. You asked me upon what you walked out there in the open. You walked upon the curvature of Space. Upon a false, a mere semblance of solidity which was the resultant balance of the forces moving you. This globe—this city—it lies immobile upon a solidity equally false—immobile because there is nothing to move it."

"I think I understand a little better," Will said slowly. "All force then, as well as all matter, has its source in the Ego-mind."

"Of course. We create matter, and movement of matter, by our own volition. We have been originally created by the Divine-thought; after which we construct and maintain our Universe by Ego-thought of our own. Inert substance—the mind laboriously creates it; flings it out, solidifies it, moulds it to our diverse purposes.

Living organisms—the reproduction of the Ego-species—is similarly of our Ego-mind origin. Yet there is a difference there. For me to reproduce myself in Ala, the Divine-Thought—the assistance shall I say of the Great-Creator—again is necessary. We have not been quite able to fathom why it is so—but it is. There is a difference between an Ego and a thing inert—a vital something which only the Great-Creator can supply.”

Ala suddenly interrupted; and upon her face I saw fear. “Your friends—those whom you called Bee and Rob—they are in danger. She—that girl as you called her—that girl Bee—is sending out thoughts of danger. I can feel it.”

Thone said: “Try, Ala—could you find her? Where has she gone?”

“I don’t know. Her thought-matter is streaming back here. I can feel it—very faintly—but it has reached here. She is with Rob—and there is Brutar.”

Thone was upright, with Will beside him. Will was surging with fear. “Danger to them? To my sister—to Rob—”

Thone said: “He has entrapped them—Brutar has entrapped them—all unwary since they do not know how to use these new minds which are themselves. We must try and get them—Oh, my friend, there is so much that I would tell you—but another time—not now. For if they are in danger we must go to them. That Brutar is a Mind very powerful.—”

And out there in the void, Bee and I were being rushed onward. The shape of Brutar with his leering, triumphant face swept ever before us. A dark confusion of mental chaos plunged past. Dismembered,

leprous shapes of things, which I thought I saw.

Was this insanity? I felt that evil engulfing net around us—pressing us—dragging us through the darkness.

Then abruptly the scene clarified. The darkness melted before a luminosity so blessed I could have cried aloud with the relief of it. The leprous shapes were gone. Motion stopped; we were at rest, with the net of Brutar’s thoughts dissolving from us. Rationality. Again I could think things which were not diseased—.

I murmured: “We’re all right, Bee. You—you are well again?”

“Yes, Oh, yes, Rob. But I’m so frightened.”

Brutar stood before us. “I need you—I am fortunate to have you here. You whom they call Rob—with your knowledge of that Earth-place you can be of great help to me.”

He swung toward Bee. “You whom them call a girl—” His twisted look was horrible. “I am glad to have you. We shall go to your Earth together—I welcome you both to this place where we are preparing for our great Earthly conquest.”

He led us down a slope, into the strange activities of his encampment.

CHAPTER XII

THE ENCAMPMENT IN THE VOID

BRUTAR said, “Let us go in here. I want to talk to you.”

We entered a globe very much like those of the Big-City. And reclined at physical ease. But there was no mental peace here—for us at any rate. A turgid aura of restlessness seemed pervading everything.

Brutar rested before us. He seemed always to be regarding Bee; contem-

platively, yet with a satisfied triumph.

"I am glad to have you with us," he said; not harshly now, rather with an ingratiating note as though he sought our good will. "We are going to your Earth—to live there, and they tell me, these good people of mine, that they are going to make me its ruler."

He spoke with a false modesty, as though to impress us with his greatness forced upon him by his adoring followers. "I want you two for my friends—you will be of great help to me."

"How?" I demanded.

I had recovered from my confusion. I was wary; the thought came to me that I might be able to trick this Brutar—that being here with him—to see and feel what he was doing—was an advantage which later on I could turn to account. I wondered if he could hear or feel that thought. I willed it otherwise; and it seemed that he could not. His eyes were upon me, gauging me.

"How could we help you?" I repeated. "And why should we? You mean harm to our world."

"No," he protested. "No harm. We have selected it—your Earth—from all that great Universe of yours which I have inspected. We want to go to your Earth to live. That is all. You can help me, because you know so many things of Earth that I do not. I want you to tell me of them . . . Stand up!"

I found myself upright, whether by my own volition or his I cannot say.

"Stand up, Bee!"

At his command she also stood erect. He came to us; his hands went to the belts we wore about our waists. I had forgotten my belt—

those things in its pouches which Will had bade me not touch. Brutar took them now—my weapons perhaps. And those which Bee carried; took them, discarded them behind him. They floated away; I could barely see them—small formless blobs to my uncomprehending thoughts.

I had very nearly resisted Brutar; but it seemed a futile thing, and I stood quiet. Again we reclined. "Tell me of your Earth," he said; and began to question me.

I told him what I could. I had determined that my best plan was to appear friendly. I wondered how one would escape from a place like this. I was more accustomed to this strange state of being now; knowledge which seemed instinctive was growing within me. I knew that if Brutar's net of thoughts were not to hold me—if I could momentarily be freed of other thought-matter—then I could project myself out into the void. I believed I could find my way back to the Big-City—once having been there I would have the power to return.

This latter knowledge brought with it a thrill of triumph. I believed that Will and Thone had never been here in Brutar's strong-hold. Perhaps this was a secret place which they could not find. But now I had been here; and if I could escape, I could lead others back to it.

With these guarded thoughts surreptitiously roaming through my mind, I was all the while describing our Earth to Brutar. He interrupted me once. "Eo, come here."

I became aware of another shape hovering near us. It now advanced; and with Brutar's words of explanation it took form in the fashion of a young man. A smiling, deferential

youth seemingly of an age just reaching maturity. He came forward meekly. Brutar spoke.

"THIS is my friend whom we call Eo. I have trust in him—he is helping me greatly. I want him to hear what you have to say, Rob."

Eo smiled again. "I hope we shall be friends." He regarded Bee, and his smile was curiously gentle. "They call you a girl? Brutar tells me what girls are—I am glad to see you."

He reclined beside Bee, continuing to regard her. A very gentle, guileless youth—how queer a companion for this Brutar! And I knew then that it was gentle beings like this whom Brutar was beguiling to his purpose.

Brutar said, "Go on, Rob. What you can tell us will be very interesting."

Particularly he questioned me about our physical bodies of Earth—the human body; and when I told him how mortal it was, how easily injured, he seemed disturbed. But only for a moment.

"I have been—well, very nearly in your Earth-state," he said. "I know how it feels. You have things with which to harm that body. Weapons—tell me of them."

I described our weapons; our warfare. Our poisons. I will admit it gave me a gloating pleasure grew so much to picture all the dangers to which our mortal flesh is heir. But outwardly he was undisturbed. He interrupted me once with a sharp admonition to Bee.

"You think you can send your thoughts back to the Big-City and guide them here, don't you? I would not try that, if I were you!"

Bee started with guilt. She had been attempting to do that. Her

thoughts had gone back, at first instinctively, then with a conscious direction, but he was stopping her now. Around us like a veil a barrier was materializing.

Eo said gently, "She will not do that, Brutar. She is friendly to us." His hand very lightly touched Bee. He added earnestly, "I like you—girl."

Brutar momentarily had turned away; I think he was not aware of what Eo had said. I saw that Bee was smiling. I felt her voice saying very gently.

"I like you, too. You are very kind—I think you are very good. On Earth we would call you—a boy."

"Boy!" He murmured it. "I like the way that sounds—hearing you call me—boy!"

Brutar had risen erect. "You have told me a great deal, Rob. We shall be friends." He was eyeing me. "On Earth, when we get there, I shall make you into a great man—a very powerful man. You would like that?"

Did he feel that my intelligence was so limited that he could bribe me thus crudely? I smiled.

"Oh, yes—I should like that. But I've told you so much, and you haven't told me anything. How did you first find our Earth? How did you get yourself into that Borderland, and beyond? You were the first to go, weren't you?"

"The first," he said proudly. "I discovered it—well, by accident. Shall I show you how? And what I am doing to take all my loyal followers there with me?"

"Yes." I agreed. "That is what I want."

He led us outside. Eo walked close by Bee. I saw now that the encampment was itself one tremendous hollow globe; on Earth we would have said that it had a diameter of at

least a mile. Brutar explained it proudly. Here, in the void of Space, his organized workmen had spun this huge shell of thought-matter. It was tenuous; I had not known when we passed through it coming in. Yet it was visible; within it we gazed at its interior surface. It glowed with a very pale dull light.

Upon this concave slope, in the foreground near us, were a variety of globes—small habitations for the workers. Paths ran between and over them. Further away, other larger globes glowed as though translucent, with light inside. Beyond them was a shimmering white lake—water or mist. Higher up—in the distance where the concave surface extended upward and swept back over our heads—was what seemed like dark soil. Things were growing there in orderly rows—a gigantic concave field of plants. It was dim off there, and so far above us that I could not make them out plainly.

Again, close at hand, just beyond the village of globes, was an enclosure possibly a thousand feet across. Movement was there—busy workers moving in the artificial glow of strings of lights. Vague, shifting shadows—grey shapes of men, from which the lights cast monstrous grey shadows as they moved. It seemed a dim inferno of strange industry incomprehensible. . . . Brutar led us toward it.

"We built all this," he said; and his gesture encompassed the entire inner void within that glowing tenuous shell. "We built and poised this here in Space. My followers have forsaken their homes to join me here. Soon we will go to your Earth-realm. . . . Some of us often go out there now—into that Borderland—to test our power."

The enclosure had a wall about it

—a thick high wall built of a grey substance lying in layers, folded in convolutions. We stood upon the wall, gazing at the scene within.

"I would not have you see too much—now," Brutar said.

A cunning look was on his face. "Not—too much, until we are better friends and I can be sure of your loyalty."

THE lights were dazzling when near at hand—yet their rays carried but a little distance. I saw in the foreground beneath us, a section where men were squatting one behind the other in a long curved line. Their backs were bent forward, with heads and necks unnaturally held upright. Their arms and hands were outstretched in a curious attitude as with supplication. There must have been two hundred of the men, squatting in this single line which curved in a crescent until its end was near its beginning. They were men with bodies which seemed shrunken; their arms and hands very long; thin, tenuous. But their heads were overlarge; distorted to a swollen size.

Brutar said softly, "Now—in a moment—watch them."

A leader, raised above these squatting, motionless workmen, gave a signal. From the head of the man at the back of the line a pallid light seemed streaming. It was very faint—a glow of pale white light, no more. But as I stared, breathless, I saw that it was not exactly like light, but a stream of something moving. Very faint; a fog, a mist, which a sweep of the hand might dissipate.

It streamed forward; and as it passed the head of the next man, there seemed additional light adding to it. Both men had their hands up, as though to guide the stream—

gently to guide that which must have been very nearly impalpable.

But it was growing in density. Soon, further up the line with every brain contributing a share, the slowly moving stream began to have substance. From vague, luminous pallidness, it turned darker; gaining a solidity—a weight. The guiding hands sustained it, moulded it, pushed it onward.

It came to the end of the line. Other workers appeared; carried it away—a long flexible rod of newly created thought-matter. The basic inorganic substance of this world. The thickness of a man's body, it seemed coming of interminable length. Then the first worker gave out—dropped back exhausted. Then others. The rod grew tenuous and pale in places. It broke. Workers carried away the broken segments. It was not a solid yet; they moulded it by their touch as they carried it away.

Another signal from the leader. The two hundred workmen, their duty done for the time, rose and departed. They moved unsteadily, exhausted. And another shift came to take their places.

How long a spell of mental work this might have been, I cannot say. Bee asked me, in an awed whisper, how long we had been watching. A futile question! As Will once said, "Like trying to add an apple to an orange." To me—idly watching, and with memory of an Earth-standard of what we are pleased to call Time—I would have said, five minutes. To one of those laboring workers—an eternity of effort. Yet in our fatuous little world of Earth we tick off seconds, minutes, hours, and think we are establishing a standard for the Universe!

Brutar said, "That is the crude

thought-material. From there it goes to our workshops, where other minds bring it to higher, individual substances from which we make—well, we make these things we are making here."

His look of cunning came again. He would give away no secrets to me—his enemy. He seemed very proud of his cunning, this Brutar. A man of low intelligence, I realized. Yet he must be powerful, to be the leader of all this. Later I learned that he had a powerful mind—not for creating this useful substance of industry; nor was his an intellect of keen reasoning ability. Rather was it a mind powerful for the weaving of that tenuous thought-substance of combat. He was a warrior. And in mental speech as well, he was fluent, plausible, guileful.

Bee was saying, "Is all work mental?"

He did not understand the question. He said, "She means, is all work done by the mind?"

"Oh yes," Brutar smiled. "Why not? Except—well you've seen what part the hands play—the bodies. It is comparatively unimportant."

"May we see what they are doing with that thought-substance?" I suggested.

"No," he smiled. "I told you before, not now."

I did not press it. I was wondering if the shell of this huge globe would let me through. Could I clutch Bee and will myself away into the void? Could I not thus escape Brutar....

My thoughts must have reached him. He said sharply, "If you regard the welfare of your mind, Rob, you will not attempt to wander." His tone changed to a menacing contempt. "I can strike that sickly mind

of yours from your body in an instant. Have a care!"

I fancied I caught a warning glance from Eo. Bee gave a low half-suppressed cry of fear. I smiled at Brutar.

"You are too suspicious," I said. "If we are to be friends you go about it badly."

He did not answer that, and I added, "You said you would tell us how you discovered our Earth-realm. It must have seemed an extraordinary discovery."

His vanity was easily touched. He smiled again.

"Yes, I will tell you. And show you. It is no secret—that leader Thone of the Big-City knows it. . . . So I do not mind showing you."

CHAPTER XIII

THE LOLOS FLOWER

WE stepped back from the wall. Brutar led us onward through the twilight. We passed globes translucent with light from within; heard the hum and hiss of work going on—but Brutar would not let us enter. We passed a dark bowl of enormous size, like a great globe cut in half. We encircled its rim. I stared down into darkness; grey shapes of inert things were ranged there—things which had been manufactured of the thought-substance, I surmised. But Brutar would not say.

We skirted the misty lake. It seemed a blanket of fog lying there. Within me, at the sight, a vague pang stirred. A desire—unpleasant in its suggestion of a needed gratification; and with it a premonition of coming pleasure.

I was puzzled. There was no instinct to guide me; or if there was,

my puzzled reason subverted it. I described my feeling to Eo.

"It seems physical," I said. "I had forgotten my body—but there seems a pang there."

"Thirst," he said readily. The word he used, gave me the thought of thirst. And this was water, or its equivalent.

I knelt beside the white layers of mist. Did I inhale it, or drink it? I have no means of knowing; but I know that the pang left me, and that the experience was vaguely pleasant.

We moved on. Came at last to the great field. Behind us the opposite side of the encampment—the enclosure wherein I had seen the creation of thought-material—was now almost over our heads. The ground of the field was soft and flaky—it seemed as though it might have been a black soil lying in flakes. Things were rooted within it—growing things set in long orderly rows that stretched up the concave surface into the dimness of distance. They appeared to be plants; in height about to my knee. A central stalk; branches bent outward like gesturing arms. A bud, or flower, at the top. It seemed to carry features—a face. My imagination? Something that had been said or suggested to me? Possibly. But the things bent aside as we advanced upon them. They seemed eyeing us; suddenly I was conscious of a myriad eyes from everywhere fixed upon me.

I said to Brutar, "This black ground—is that thought-material?"

"Yes," he said. "Made from the same substance you saw created. But many mental processes were necessary to bring it to this final state."

"And then you planted these—things in it?" I asked. "They look as though they had an intelligence. I

don't understand that. Are they growing here—or what?"

Brutar hesitated. I think that the man's learning was not very great. Eo said:

"I believe I can explain it, Rob. All things in our world are divided into two classes. One—the inert, material bodies. These we create from nothingness to their final perfected state. The other class—living organisms—is very different. The addition of a Creator-Thought is necessary. These plants—to be specific—are called lolos. The lolos plant. To create it we must have a spore—an infinitesimal something already existing. With this spore, others like it may be created by our own mentalities. And nurtured by our mentalities through a period of growth. But that latter process can be simplified by the production of this soil in which the plants are then nourished. It is basically an identical process."

"IT is much like our own world," I said. "Except that these plants seem to have a conscious mind."

"Why not?" Brutar demanded. "Every living thing has a mind."

Eo added, "Since the essence of everything is mentality—naturally the spark of life must bring that mentality to consciousness."

"These things then," I said, "they know that they are alive?"

"Of course. And Rob, what you told Brutar of your Earth-agriculture—what you called your vegetable kingdom—seems not so very different from ours."

"But it is different," I said. "Our plants—our growing things—are not aware that they are alive."

Eo demanded gently, "How do you know that? Is it not perhaps that

your own mentality is lacking, to gauge the power of theirs?"

I smiled. "It may be so. . . Brutar, these lolos plants—what is their purpose?"

"With them we are going to your Earth," he said. "This lolos plant of itself has a power very wonderful. We crush it; and the blood of it taken into our body, sends the mind upon strange and pleasant wanderings."

"Evil wanderings," said Eo.

A drug! As Brutar further explained, I realized it. And I wondered if this lolos plant—the name of it—sounded thus since to my own mentality it suggested the lotus flower. I think that was so.

The blood of this plant was a powerful narcotic. Brutar had been addicted to its use; and his wandering mind had come into the Borderland. He had seen our Earth-realm; gone further until he experienced the sensations of our physical consciousness. Had come back, to gather his followers; to create in quantity the blood of this lolos that all might go to conquer and enjoy this greater realm.

Brutar was absorbed in his subject. Listening to him, I had nevertheless noticed that Bee's attention was fixed upon Eo. She was whispering to him. With his sweet, boyish face, he was listening to her, enraptured. He was close beside her, and I saw that he was touching her. Brutar, still talking to me, bent to show me one of the lolos plants. It shrank away from him as though in fear. He frowned; struck it a blow with his hand. His attention momentarily was diverted from us. I heard Eo murmur softly, yet tensely.

"You are right—girl. This is evil—I realize it now. . . Rob! Hold your-

self firm! Stay with me! We will try to escape. . ."

I MUST revert now to Will, Thone and Ala in the Big-City. They had felt Bee's thoughts; they knew we were in danger; Ala had caught just enough to know that we were with Brutar.

"We must go," Thone hastily declared. "Try and follow them, Ala. . . . That Brutar is a mind very powerful for evil."

With Will held firmly between them, they swept out into space. To Will it was a dream, a nightmare of mental chaos. Rushing through the dark—through seemingly endless Space for endless Time. But he saw none of the distorted things that I had seen, for he was in friendly hands. A rushing black Nothingness sweeping past. A vague dream of flight; but presently he found his mind clearing.

The void was illimitable. But soon it seemed not wholly empty. To one side was a faint glow—an infinite distance away, as though it might have been a nebula gleaming over Space a thousand million Light-years of distance. Or something shining from another Time—eons away. It moved sidewise as they swept along. It glowed, faded, was gone.

"We will not go there." Ala murmured. She seemed to shudder. "That is the Realm of Disease. I hope never to go there."

Endless Time passing. Or perhaps, as Will was thinking, Time was in abeyance, standing still, non-existent.

And Will saw other far-off gleaming patches, like faint drifting stardust. Soon they were gone. He did not ask what they might be.

Ala still felt Bee's thoughts. Then they ceased. Will became aware of a confusion; a fluttering; as though

now the flight had lost direction. He gazed around intently, searchingly, but the space at that moment was wholly empty.

"Where are we?" he asked.

Thone and Ala were exchanging thoughts. Thone said:

"Where are we? There is no answer, Will. There is nothing here. We are nowhere."

A confusion. It seemed that Ala and Thone felt that Brutar's self-created world might be found by approaching the Realm of Disease. Will waited, listening silently while they talked of it. . . .

Abruptly Will saw something. A blur—a vague luminosity beneath them. It was moving. Suddenly he knew it was not large and far-away, but small and very close. It mounted; broke visually apart, resolved itself into two dark blobs. Shapes. The moving shapes of a man and a woman.

They came nearer. The woman was Bee! It was Bee and the youthful Eo. He was clinging to her; she seemed helping him struggle upward.

They reached Will. Bee gasped, "He—he is hurt! Oh Will—it's you! Help him—his mind struggles to leave us! He is wounded. I think—I think he is going to die!"

She seemed crying as she flung herself into Will's arms. "I don't want him to die. He is my friend—so gentle, so lovable—I don't want him to die!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE REALM OF DEATH

I MUST tell again of that moment when we—Bee and I—were standing beside the lolos field with Brutar and Eo. Brutar

had turned away. Eo—prompted, I had no doubt, by Bee—murmured, "This is evil! We will escape—"

My arm reached for Bee. I told myself intensely that now we must escape....now I must fling my thoughts—my mind—out into the void....And stay with Eo; he would lead us....

I think my groping hand never reached Bee. I felt a swishing sound. A swirl of thoughts struck me—like feathers blown against me in a gale. But they seemed to cling. Invisible, imponderable—barely palpable; dimly I could feel these thoughts like a net entangling me.

I was floundering. Surging through blackness. Where was Bee? I thought I saw her and Eo whirling near me. But it was a thought unreal—hallucination; for as I tried to grip it and make them visible, they were gone. My thought of them dissolved into a realization that I did not see them, for they were vanished.

But Brutar I saw; a distorted wraith of him....his grim, menacing face....grim with combat....

I was rushing through blackness. But as an undertow may suck the strongest swimmer, something was pulling me back....a hampering net around me....materializing into greater ponderability....holding me firmly....The blackness about me was taking form. I strove to think I saw the Big-City. Told myself that that hovering shape above me was Thone—the friendly Thone; not Brutar.

But it was not Thone; and this place that was clarifying to my vision was not the Big-City. The lolos field! I came—was dragged, sucked back to it! The lolos field—I was standing there where before I had been. And the menacing shape was

Brutar—my captor standing there grimly confronting me.

But Bee and Eo were gone.

These two, escaping, came upon Thone, Will and Ala as I have related. Came upon them hovering nowhere in the void. Eo was stricken. Brutar, with what quickness and evil power of mind I could not conceive, had struck at Eo. A wound, a derangement not physical, but mental. His mind now—sick, stricken with disease. Almost wandering; yet not quite unhinged—for the power of his will was holding it. Bravely he clung to sanity. Fought for it. Yet those—his friends with him—new then that he fought a losing battle.

They hung there in the void. Bee was sobbing, "I don't want him to die! He is my friend."

He held tightly to her. His eyes were very wistful. "They call you a girl—and now I know I love you!"

The void was moving. It seemed so to Will; seemed that the blackness was moving past them. Or was it that they—the little knot of their hovering shapes—was moving? Then Will realized that it was Eo—his stricken, wandering mind—dragging them somewhere. The void seemed moving—for how long Will did not know. And then, far away, in Space and in eons of Time, something became visible. A faint star-dust glow. A luminous patch. It broadened; spread to the sides, and up and down until everywhere before them lay its gleaming radiance.

The realm of disease! Will heard Ala murmur it in accents of sorrow and apprehension. Eo was rushing for it—and no power that they had could stop him.

The radiance intensified. A fear—a shuddering horror possessed Will. With every instinct within him, he recoiled from the approach. Re-

volted. But he held tightly to Thone and to Bee; told himself that they would lead him safely.

Everything was glowing; they were wholly within the glow now. A silvery glow that shone everywhere about them. But soon to the silver there came a greenish caste. It deepened. A green, with its sickly look of death. Green, with the silver turning to a pallid, flat, dead whiteness. And then a mingled brown; a murk, like a fog pervading everything.

Abruptly Will became conscious that Eo was no longer with them. His last despairing cry; and Bee's echo. He was going—floating downward; while they, uncontaminated, hovered above, at the edge of the realm, to see it but not to enter.

Will saw but dimly. Saw shapes floating in there. Dismembered shapes. Others, whole, floating inert. A caldron, with bubbles of sight and sound, and smell. Shroded in murk. Unreal. . . . A wailing. . . . sobbing. . . . faint aerial voices wailing like ghosts distraught. . . . And a stench—the thought of it, no more—but to Will the thought, the knowledge of all this was horrible, fearsome. Singularly fearsome; above everything at that moment he feared this realm, this state of unnatural, tortured existence. . . .

They could still talk to Eo. See him there, laboring, losing his brave fight to come back to them. He seemed very far away; and yet very close, for though his form was down there, engulfed with all the leprous horrors of disease, his voice was very plainly heard. And his face, the image of it, the physical representation of it to Will's thought, seemed again at hand. His eyes were very wistful. He was smiling gently at Bee.

"Soon, girl, I will be gone—into

death—it is very near now. I can see it—see it, just ahead. . . ."

Will saw it, too. Another realm beyond the one they were skirting. The realm of death. It lay close ahead. Dark. Mysterious. Scarce to be seen, but only imagined.

Again came Eo's faint voice. "I shall—be there in a moment. It is very—beautiful. I can see it—right here—" And then he suddenly whispered, "I love you, my girl Bee—"

And vanished.

DR DID HE vanish? The shell of him then seemed lying in Bee's arms. But it was an empty nothing; the shell of a shape of something which once had been, but now was not. . . .

Thone said gravely, "Watch it, Will. The Thought is gone from it. Our own thought-matter is all that is left. You shall see of what permanence that is."

The dead shell lay inert. It was dissolving. . . . Growsome. . . . Will turned away; then forced his vision back to see a leprous wraith—a rotting shape which presently, like a melting fog, began to dissipate. Dissolving, until the very last essence of it was gone into nothingness.

Ala seemed to sigh. "It is very horrible. Yet I think that we are wrong to consider it so, for it is Nature."

Will recovered himself. The realm of disease had withdrawn to a memory. Around him the blackness seemed purified. But ahead he could see—or thought he saw—that other endless realm where dwell what we call the dead. Questions flooded him. Eo was there? Could they not go and see him? Could he—this Entity which had once been Eo—could he not still speak to them from beyond the borders of death?

Thone said, "We will approach it if you wish."

Unnamable time; and then Will found that they were there, hovering; and a realm, a place—a something he knew not what—lay spread above them. Earnestly he groped for it. Not with his physical hands; but with his senses. His thought went there and back. He thought he saw shapes up there. Hovering, glowing shapes in a great light space. And with futile, childish imagination he endowed them with beautiful, ethereal qualities; transfigured them into glowing human shapes of beauty and peace. And thought he saw them; and that they might speak to him. Or that perhaps, because Thone might be more than human, they might communicate with Thone, and thence to him.

And then he laughed. It was all so childish!

Thone said, "Eo is there, in the darkness and the light. You can think of him. Your thought will go there. And it will come back to you, fraught with what qualities your imagination may lend it. But nothing else."

"No," said Will, "nothing else. I understand that now."

CHAPTER XV

THE BIRTH OF A THOUGHT

THEY TURNED away in the void—away from the dark-light mystery of the realm of death, and drove themselves back to the Big-City. The search for Brutar's encampment was at the moment futile; they knew they could not reach it. And though Bee had escaped with Eo, she did not know whether I escaped or not.

They hoped to find me safely re-

turned to the Big-City. But I was not there. But still Thone felt that I might come. To Will—with his inherent, instinctive conception of a placid, measured Time—the delay seemed dangerous. He was impatient; anxious to do something. But there was nothing which of himself he could do; and Thone was an Intelligence very keen. Will decided that upon Thone he must rely.

They went back to the home globe, to rest and to wait for my possible arrival. Will in a way was glad of the inactivity, for he remembered that of Thone's plans he knew almost nothing. He would learn all he could; and with something definitely arranged, they could act to better purpose.

Will felt the pangs of hunger. They brought a glowing brazier wherein something smouldered. He ate—inhaled, there is no word for it. Satisfied his pangs; and drank of the silver mist which came flowing into the globe at a word of command. . . . And slept; lost consciousness, to find himself in blackness with Time wholly gone.

But still I did not come back to the Big-City. There were times when with Thone, Will journeyed about the city streets, gazing at this strange life. He saw thought-workers, as I had seen them in Brutar's encampment. Saw the water being created; saw the thought-matter moulded and spun into new globes—moulded to all the diverse purposes of this Ego-life.

He slept again; several times; and ministered to the slight wants of his tenuous body. A great length of time seemed passing; and still I did not arrive.

There were many talks that Will had with Thone. Ala and Bee were generally there, as befitted those of their sex.

Sex? It was interesting to Will. The creation of the individual Ego of this strange realm, so different an existence, and yet in fundamental conception so like his own. Already he believed that the same Creator governed both. With strange ways that we mortals so little understand, over all the realms, the states of existence, the Universes that possibly could exist—only one Creator held sway. The Thought—there could be but One.

Will said, "You once spoke, Thone, of yourself as Ala's parent. And the necessity of the Thought to the creation of Ego life. Will you explain that? In our world we have two sexes. Have you also?"

"Yes," said Thone. "In the higher forms of life—we humans, as you would say—there are, like yours, two sexes. Call me a man—and Ala a woman. The difference is one of mental capacity; mental qualities, inherent perhaps to the Ego. I call it the Soul, though we have no name for it. I mean that something which makes each individual different from every other.

"The qualities inherent to the individual mould and form the mentality. Characterize thus, what we call its sex. The one sex is a complement to the other. An attraction exists between them—a desire for proximity so that of their own inherent force they will draw together. And the one mentality derives force—a mental life-force—from the other. An exchange—for it yields its own necessary qualities in return. Thus we have the mating—the basis of the family. Without it no complete mental health is possible. There is no mentality capable of existing in health by itself."

"AND A birth?" Will suggested. "Communion of thought. The desire, the longing of two closely interwoven mentalities of complementary qualities. When they combine with an intensity of longing, the thought-matter they mutually create brings into existence another, smaller shape like themselves. It is very small—very tenuous—scarce to be seen save by those two who have produced it. It lies inert. Almost formless, though they sit beside it and strive with their loving thoughts of what it should be—strive to give it form. It may continue to lie inert; and at last in spite of their efforts, it may dissolve, dissipate—be gone, back into Nothingness from whence they drew it. The Thought was not within it; it never was anything then save a human longing unblest.

"Or again, the Thought may be there. It lives. Grows ponderable. Moves of itself. Thinks of itself. Then it *is* something itself—something independent of all save its creator-divine.... The little nourishment of its body is easily supplied; the mother-parent gives it lovingly the needed gentler nourishment of the mind; daily she adds to it the loving tendrils of her thought-matter so tenuous that to the sight it seems mere light.

"But if the spark is there, glowing brightly, the little Ego lives. Grows in size. Displays a growing mental capacity of its own. Its own mental qualities make themselves known, to identify it as a man-child, or a woman-child. And the Ego, developing, brings it to individuality. It is *Itself*; unlike everyone else. The new Individual.... That, my friend Will, is a birth."

Will thought a moment. "There is a beauty to it."

Bee said, "I don't quite under-

stand—" She gazed at Will, puzzled; and Will felt and understood her confusion. He said:

"Your explanation, Thone, seems to make Man differ from Woman only in qualities of the Soul and Mind. You do not speak of the body; yet to me, Ala here appears of very different form from yourself."

Thone smiled. "You say, 'to me.' You have answered yourself, my friend. The physical aspect of everything is but the reflected image of it within our own mentality. The gentleness of Ala—those qualities which make her what she is—are seen by you in the form of what you call a woman."

"But," protested Will, "does she not look the same to you?"

"**T**HAT I do not know," he returned earnestly. "Nor do you. We can only see, think, imagine for ourselves. Our conscious universe is our own; it exists of our own creation, and what it is of itself apart from us, I do not know."

"We have on Earth," Will said, "a school of philosophical thinking which believes that nothing exists apart from the mentality perceiving it. Believes that without a consciousness of existence, nothing can exist."

"That may be so," Thone replied gravely.

Bee was still puzzled. She said to Thone, "Ala, to me, looks different from you. She looks, as Will says, like a girl. Won't you tell us how she looks to you?"

He thought a moment. "She looks—like Ala," he said slowly. "I think we mould our images from the individual itself—not upon a generality of sex." She looks to me like Ala, as I know her to be. Very gentle. Very keen of reasoning. Very quick—"

He smiled. "Yet not always so very logical. She looks like the Ala of my creation—mine and that other mentality whom you would call her mother—" His voice turned solemn, with a singular hush to it. "Her mother—who has long since gone into that realm of mystery."

At other times they talked of practical subjects. Brutar's coming invasion of Earth; my own fate, since I still was missing, unheard from. And they talked of what could be done to overcome Brutar and his horde of followers.

Thone, it seemed to Will, had accomplished very little. He had learned of Brutar's purpose; and of the establishment of his realm. Thone had sent—by the aid of the lolos plant—an adventurer into the Borderland who had seen Brutar and some of his cohorts experimenting with the Earth-state. Then Ala had gone into the Borderland; had met Will; had arranged to bring him, Bee and myself back to see her parent.

Little of accomplishment! A public meeting of protest, which we had attended; and which Brutar invaded. But now Thone was organizing his Thinkers—his army, as it might have been called on Earth. Their purpose was to seek out Brutar's realm by concerted effort of thought; to find it while Brutar's preparations were still incomplete; and to destroy it.

The very conception of warfare of this kind was difficult for Will to encompass. There were no weapons—nothing of the sort we on Earth would call weapons. Will showed Thone his broad belt, and the contents of its pouches. He drew out a revolver and a knife. Thone inspected them curiously—shadowy, glowing objects which almost floated

when tossed into the air, so considerable were they.

Will explained their Earthly uses. He said, a trifle shamefacedly, "I brought them—but I felt they would be of no advantage here."

He pulled the trigger of the revolver. If it discharged, there was no result which his Ego-senses could perceive. Thone said, handing him the knife, "Strike me with it."

The action was instinctively revolting; yet Will drove the knife-blade into the semblance of Thone's arm. Thone said, "It seems to hurt."

To Will the knife might have been a feather he was thrusting against a pillow. He withdrew the blade; fancied he saw in Thone's arm an open gash. But if he did, the gash closed at once. The outlines of the arm were quivering, unreal, under Will's earnest gaze. And he knew that if he persisted in regarding it, the arm would turn formless to his sight.

He exclaimed, "Useless! Of course." And tossed the knife away. But Thone recovered it. "In the Borderland it would be more effective, Will. Keep it."

Thone explained how his army of Thinkers might destroy Brutar's encampment. The thought-matter, created, was held in substance only by continued mental effort. And this withdrawn, at once the disintegrating forces of Nature would dissolve it into nothingness.

"So it is," Thone said, "when an Ego dies. The persistent, subconscious effort of mind during life is all that holds the shell of body in existence. Withdraw that—and you have dissolution."

"And with inorganic matter—" Will began.

"With this globe, for instance," said Thone. "With everything we

have created, a worker-mentality must guard it. Replenish it."

To Will that seemed not very strange. "On Earth," he said, "we must repair. Nature slowly but steadily tears down that which we have built."

"**O**F COURSE," Thone responded. "We will destroy Brutar's encampment, himself and all his followers. Rather should I say, we will force them to stop replenishing—and Nature will destroy."

Then Will said, "Let me ask you this: I understand that if you, with your weaving of the net of thoughts, are quicker, more powerful than I, you will beat down my resistance. Entrap me; force my body to follow you."

"Or to depart from me," Thone added. "I could force you back—as far from me as I could spin the net."

"I was thinking—suppose we must fight them in the Borderland—"

"A combat at once physical and mental," Thone retorted. He smiled. "You think we are ill-prepared, Will? That is not so. My men of Science have studied this condition—experimented with it very fully. The Borderland—the transition into your Earth-state—all such things are new to us. But we are coming to understand them. And I think that Brutar's people know little of their subject...."

He paused in contemplation; then went on slowly. "We are not sure how permanent may be the transition by the lolos-blood into the state of your Earth-matter. Brutar may be mistaken in that—"

He paused again. His smile had a gleam of irony; and there came into his voice an ironic note. "I am not sure but that from the Borderland, our opposing thoughts might not

reach your Earth-state. They might, perhaps, do strange things to those of Brutar's people who have reached there—who have taken with them what they may think are effective weapons."

That Thone had learned, or divined much of Brutar's purpose, and that he was prepared to combat it, was evident. But at the moment he chose to speak no further. He added abruptly, "My Thinkers are organized. Very soon they will be ready. The mind, my friend Will, grows strong only with use. Every moment that they can, they are developing the strength of battle.... Come here and see."

They passed upward upon the side of the globe; and at once its opaque wall began to glow; become translucent; transparent, until through it Will saw the city. An open space, from this angle seemingly tilted on end, was nearby. Within it a horde of shapes were squatting. Figures which after a moment of inspection seemed men—gaunt of body, but with craniums distended. A horde—a myriad; Will could not have guessed at their number. Squatting in a giant spiral curving inward to its center point. From the heads of them all light was streaming. It spun in a band close over them; whirled, flashed with iridescent color. A spiral band of light, concentrating at the center point into a beam that shot away and was lost in the darkness.

The globe wall became again opaque; the scene vanished. Thone said softly, "There is much power for combat in mentalities like those. And very soon I will put them to searching for Brutar's realm."

A cry from Ala interrupted him. The girl had been seated as though

in meditation; but now she flung herself erect.

"I can find this encampment of Brutar—I can lead you to it now!"

Thone stared.

"Are you getting thoughts from it?" Will demanded eagerly. And Bee gave a glad exclamation. She asked, "Is Rob there? Is he safe, Ala? Can you take us to him?"

"I do not know if he is there, or safe. Oh, I cannot tell you those things! I only know I can take you to Brutar's realm!"

"You feel no thoughts from there?" said Thone.

"No."

Thone was standing with the others. No delay now. He was ready. He said to Will, "It is the nameless power. Those only whom you call women have it."

"Intuition," Will supplied.

"We say, the nameless.... You may try, Ala. And, if once you take me there—" A restrained, grave triumph was upon him.

"Once I have been there, with perfect sureness I can lead our Thinkers to the attack."

Again in the void.... The power of woman's mentality—the nameless power; illogical, against all reason, all science; not to be explained.... But it was leading them.... A rush through the darkness of vague, unreasoning woman's thought; a distance, a time felt, but unmeasurable; a direction not to be fathomed.... And then, ahead of them as in a clinging group they followed Ala, the glow of a poised realm became visible. They neared it; hovered in the void regarding it. And knew and saw that it was Brutar's realm—that great, tenuous globe hanging there like a gigantic bubble. They could see within it; see details as though

by some magnification the details were close at hand.

The encampment was deserted! Abandoned! The lolos field was uprooted; its plants gone. The globes, the workshops, the streets, fields—all were deserted. And more than that, with the removal of all conscious, constructive, replenishing mentality, disintegration already was taking place. A leprous realm. Holes of Nothingness were visibly eating their way into everything. Rotting walls....rotting habitations....

Under the gaze of the watchers the whole realm was melting. Dissolving into slow-flowing viscosity; cesspools of putridity, rising into mists, vapors—a puff of Nothingness....

The realm was vanished. The void was black, empty and silent. The little group of apprehensive watchers turned away.

Brutar—presumably taking me with him—had already started his invasion of Earth!

CHAPTER XVI

THE MARCH OF THE GHOSTS

I REMAINED a captive of Brutar; and at length the time came when he was ready to start his conquest of Earth. His army, his followers, quietly had departed from the encampment, and were waiting for him in the Borderland. He stood before me—we two the last living minds remaining in his self-created realm. Around me I could see it even then beginning to rot and crumble.

He said, "The blood of the lolos is ready for us, Rob. But before we start I will warn you—if once more you try to escape you will be killed."

I could not doubt but that he spoke his true intent.

He brought then a bowl, or brazier, in which like food the dried burning blood of the lolos was glowing. It was a dull red in the gloom, with tiny green tongues licking upward from it. I could not see the smoke. But I could sense it—smell it. We reclined by the brazier. The fumes brought a reeling of my senses. Unpleasant, frightening...Then pleasant indeed. A drowsy drifting into rosy vacancy. I had intended not to yield myself wholly, but my will weakened....I told myself that Brutar would guide me....

Out of the darkness at last with returning consciousness I found a gentle net of Brutar's thoughts cradling me. And himself regarding me impatiently.

"Come, Rob. We are here. Stay close by me—and if you help me as I wish, reward shall be yours."

There was a tenseness to his voice. I gazed around. We were in the Borderland—that same dark void with its rolling slopes. Near at hand I saw some two hundred of Brutar's workers—his fighters—drawn up in orderly array. Shadows like myself. And behind them a rabble of Egos in the fashion of men, women and children. His followers, waiting to enter the Earth-realm when the fighters had conquered it.

I saw, too, hovering near Brutar and me, a dozen shapes of men—the leaders of Brutar's army awaiting his instructions.

When I was more fully alert Brutar drew me aside. He spoke with a new force and succinctness. Because now the time for action had come and I think also that as we neared our Earth-state, there was a tenden-

cy toward restoration of all Earthly qualities.

"Rob," he said, "I'll tell you now my plan. Your greatest city is near at hand—somewhere near here."

"New York," I said.

"Yes. I plan to attack it—demolish it. It's a very small portion of your Earth, of course, but with that evidence of my power I think your Earth-leaders will cease to fight me—will admit my supremacy. If not—well, then I shall demolish each of your great cities in turn—"

He told me then that these two hundred men, with his dozen sub-leaders, were all the fighting force he at first proposed to use. We were about to attack New York City. His people would wait, here in the Borderland, for our success; then would enter the Earth-state to take possession of it.

"You can help me, Rob, because you know your city better than I do. Look around us now—tell me exactly, where are we?"

I saw then the shadows of ghostly houses. My own world! Grey, spectral houses....streets....a church....trees lining a street of residences in a small quiet town. It lay in a plane tilted at a slight angle, and perhaps thirty feet above us. I looked up to the street overhead. Quiet? It was thronged with people—ghostly shapes crowded up there staring down at us. It seemed to be night up there; I could see the street lights; spots of light in the houses, and the headlights of scurrying automobiles.

The town was in a turmoil. I knew that its people saw us down here as a myriad half-materialized ghosts. They were crowding to watch us. They realized that now at last the ghosts had come in a horde! Perhaps to attack. I saw policemen on the

streets; and presently a company of soldiers came along. Spurts of flame showed as evidently they fired tentatively toward the ground. But there was no sound.

Brutar chuckled. "Well, they're really frightened now! And they have cause to be. Where are we, Rob?"

It seemed possibly a suburb of New York City. I did not recognize it at once. Then off to one side I saw a shadowy river, with ghostly cliffs on its further bank. The Hudson!

"I don't know where we are," I said carefully. "Where do you want to go first, Brutar?"

"To New York City—down there where there is river all around, and a great pile of buildings."

Lower New York. But I would not lead him. I protested ignorance.

A shape approached us, a man. He gestured. "I know it is that way, Brutar."

We started. The two hundred fighters in a triple file came after us. Brutar had ordered the mob of men and women to wait where they were. We advanced slowly, and I saw with sinking heart that we were going southward. Upper New York City soon lay close ahead.

IT WAS A strange, soundless march. The slopes of the Borderland carried us sometimes above, and sometimes below the ground of Earth. But generally we were below it. Up there over our heads the shadowy landscape was silently slipping backward. It was all too familiar now. We were under upper Broadway. Huge apartment houses loomed high up there, with the Hudson almost at our level to the right.

Our advance was followed up above. From every window people

were peering fearsomely down at us. The cross streets were jammed. But ahead of us policemen were clearing them. And down empty Broadway, and down each of the North and South Avenues troops of the State Militia were marching, keeping as nearly as possible directly over us.

"Brutar," I said, "you cannot fight this world. Look at them there. They're ready—waiting."

Machine guns were posted at most of the street corners now; and as we passed beneath them they were moved swiftly forward to other streets ahead of us. The boat traffic of the river was being cleared. Police boats, armed and ready, were paralleling our march. A war-vessel lay anchored ahead, off Grant's Tomb. Its funnels were smoking, and as we neared it, very slowly it steamed along with us.

And over in Jersey and on Long Island I had no doubt they were ready with watching troops and every precaution. Let one of us who now were mere ghosts dare to materialize further, and at once we would be killed. What could Brutar do?

He laughed at my thoughts. "You shall see, Rob, when we get among the great houses and I lay my weapons."

I could not fathom what he meant, but the sure confidence of his tone had an ominous ring to it. Weapons? I saw none. We were empty-handed, Brutar and I. And the twelve sub-leaders were empty-handed as well. But of Brutar's attacking force marching behind us, I had noticed that each man was carrying a single article. I could not call them weapons; I did not know what they were. They seemed more like grey, ghostly bricks, each man carrying one.

What were they? I could no more than guess. Some material, doubtless of Brutar's creation, brought into this Borderland state. Would these ghosts, each with a simple brick like these—would they dare to materialize—dare to enter our Earth-state upon an equality of being with the armed, massed troops awaiting them? It seemed incredible. Two hundred ghosts marching in spectral array beneath the city, with soldiers above; and machine guns, and war-vessels alert to destroy them.

I told myself that there was nothing to fear. I had thought of escape. Desperately I would try to rejoin Will and Bee that we might do something to stem this invasion. Or escape, and get up there to Earth, to tell the authorities what I knew. But sober reason told me that as yet I knew very little. I had best stay with Brutar, to learn what I could.

We passed under the length of Manhattan; came at last to lower Broadway. We were close beneath it. The great shadowy piles of masonry towered above us. Looking upward I could see the shadowy outlines of the foundations of the buildings; to the right the tubes leading to New Jersey beneath the river; the network of water mains; gas; light; arteries of the city. And I could see up through the sub-cellars, the cellars, and into the buildings themselves. Towering structures with all their anatomy laid bare as though some giant X-ray were turned upon them.

We stopped; gathered in a group. We were just beneath City Hall Park, standing partly within one of the Subway tunnels. No trains were running. Soldiers were massed on the station platform. They came along the tracks—transparent ghosts

of uniformed, armed men—came until some of them passed directly through us; and stood nearby, grimly watching and waiting.

In the empty park overhead, policemen were on guard, and troops were bringing in machine guns. I could see, too, that soldiers were now massing on the shadowy Brooklyn Bridge; police boats were clustering on the river there; and armed men were waiting in the cellar of every building nearby. There were towering giants of buildings all about us here.... The Woolworth Building was close at hand....

Brutar said, "I should not care just now, to materialize further, Rob. These men look very determined." His laugh was ironical. "They are watching us closely—much good it will do them!"

He called his little band of fighters to him; they stood partly on the Subway tracks and partly beneath them. And he gave his low-toned instructions.

I saw ten of his men move aside as he indicated them. "Yes," he said. "You first. And I think I would work upon that large house over there."

Silently, with their ghostly glowing bricks in hand, the ten advanced. Across the Subway tracks, through the spectral earth and rock strata under Broadway. Climbing or floating upward, I could not tell. Moving through and into the vitals of the Woolworth Building.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ATTACKING SPECTRES

I SAID to Brutar, "You asked my help. But you have let me do nothing to help you—and you explain nothing, so that I have no

idea what is going on. Am I not enough your friend by now?"

Brutar smiled; I think he was fatuous enough to believe that he had won me over.

"You will be able to help me, Rob. We're going to place these weapons everywhere. There is a statue near here somewhere—a giant figure rising from water. I want you to lead us to it. Later—when we have finished with this great house."

"Weapons?" I echoed. "What sort of weapons?"

He continued to smile. "You called them bricks a while ago. That's what they are—inert material we brought with us. I had devised other things, but thought that these would suffice. Come here—I'll show you."

He took one of the bricks. As I stood with him to examine it, a score of the ghostly troopers came across the Subway tracks and fronted us.

It was a light substance, but quite ponderable. Solid, yet rather of the consistency of soft rubber; I seemed to be able to mould its shape slightly with my fingers. Blue-green of color or silver phosphorescence; and it glowed and shimmered in my hands.

I gave it back to Brutar. "You're going to place these—where?"

"Everywhere," he said. "You shall see. Let us go watch my men place them up there in the great house... This fellow is very bold! He doesn't seem afraid of me!"

He strode vigorously at the intent and curious soldier—passed through him; but the soldier did not move.

"Come, Rob—let's go up and watch them."

We moved under the Woolworth Building, up to and through the bottoms of its great elevator shafts. And climbing—upon what I cannot say or guess—we passed upward and into the building. Through its walls;

its skeleton framework of steel; floating back and forth through its many storied offices....Roaming ghosts!

The ten ghosts of Brutar were floating silently about. We ourselves could be seen by those within the building—seen as spectres hovering, moving with what silent, sinister purpose they did not know.

Yet they tried to resist us. We came, for instance, upon one of Brutar's men, with the brick still in his hand.

"Shall I place it here?" he asked. "We have chosen this side—I thought this might be a good spot."

We were some four stories above ground. Before us was one of the great upright girders of the structure.

"I should think so," Brutar agreed.

The man held the glowing, oblong brick within the shadowy steel. He released it, and it floated gently downward—wafted down like a feather very slowly. But it kept within the outlines of the girder.

"You'd better follow it," said Brutar. "It will stop presently—and perhaps where you want it."

Inside the building the Earth-people had seen us—we three hovering there. Men and soldiers were running from room to room, and up and down the staircases trying to get near us. There was a room and a portion of a hallway close to where we now hovered. They were soon thronged with men, crowding against the walls, within which our white shapes were visible. But the walls, solid to them, stopped their advance. They stood regarding us; and now I could see fear upon their faces as their glances followed the downward floating brick. And as it descended a story, many of them rushed down, scrambling against the walls, striv-

ing to reach into the place where they saw it.

Did they divine its purpose? I thought so; for as presently it came to rest, lodged in the upright steel where cross girders were riveted, I saw men come rushing with crowbars and axes. Frantically they were tearing at the walls, ripping out the wood and plaster, striving to reach and perhaps to dislodge that shimmering thing lying there in the vitals of the building.

Brutar laughed. "You see, Rob? They're beginning to understand now—and they're frightened. *It is materializing*—that brick, as you call it, is materializing!"

Growing solid! In a surging torrent of horror complete realization rushed over me. I scarce heard Brutar's gloating words: "That inert matter, freed of physical contact with our Borderland bodies, tends slowly to change to the state of the thing nearest to it. As heat by contact communicates, so does the vibratory rate of all substances. That brick, lodged there, is materializing. Slowly now—but soon very fast. Presently it will be as solid as the steel girder itself—a brick resting there complete in your Earth-state—demanding space of its own, for its own existence!"

SPACE of its own! What diabolical force of Nature would this unleash! These molecules, atoms, electrons of the steel and brick thus intermingled! In a Space but half sufficient! A force created of unknown, unthinkable power—immeasurable as that proverbial irresistible force meeting an immovable body. Two solid bodies here, intermingled to their very essence, striving to occupy the same space at the same time!

Brutar was drawing at me. "Look at them, Rob! Trying to get at it! And up there—and down below—see them?"

The glowing bricks were lodged up and down the building—all seemingly on the one side. Down underground, lodged in the very foundations of the structure I could see three of them piled together. And frantic shapes of men digging for them through the walls of the cellars.

"Come further away, Rob. We can see it better from a distance. It should be very interesting."

We retreated, going back until again we were standing just beneath the level of City Hall Park. Brutar's men gathered around us—two hundred ghosts clustered there watching the fruit of their diabolical efforts. There were soldiers with machine guns in the park. The guns impotently, ridiculously were trained upon us. And around the edge of the park a cordon of police kept back the crowds. I wondered what time of night it might be. Evening, possibly; and then I saw the spectral clock of the little tower of the squat City Hall. It was just before midnight.

Our march, perhaps not so much sinister as weird to the public, had drawn a jam of the morbidly curious to this part of the city. They were packed everywhere. And all the normal activities of the city were stopped. No traffic on the streets. Vehicles motionless.

The great Woolworth Building stood like the ghost of some grave giant, serene, majestic in the power of its size. Its summit up there in the gloom seemed lighted; spots of blurred light were everywhere within it.

The whole scene of shadows

seemed unreal. Like a dream. But as I saw those frantic figures scrambling within the threatened building, hacking futilely at its foundations to try and remove in time those dim, glowing bricks materializing from another realm—the stark, strange reality of it all was forced upon me.

We waited. How long I cannot say. Spectators of two realms, each to the other mere ghosts, standing there watching and waiting. For a time nothing happened throughout all the scene. And then a change was apparent in the crowds about the park. No longer were they watching us, the ghosts, but they were eyeing now the Woolworth Building. At first curiously, incredulous to believe the news which was spreading about. Then restlessly, and then, as orders evidently were passed to the troops and to the policemen, these began pushing and shoving at the people. The crowd resisted at first; moved reluctantly. Then a fear seemed to surge over them—fear growing to panic. They began trying to run—waves of them everywhere surging in panic away from the doomed building.

Hundreds went down underfoot, trampled upon in the streets by their fellows, mad, insane now with fear. And from every nearby building its occupants came tumbling out like frightened rats; scurrying out to join the panic of the streets. A chaos everywhere....

And we ghosts stood quiet and serene in its midst.

Brutar murmured. "Watch the great house. They know it is doomed. See, they have stopped their efforts in there—now at the last, trying to save themselves."

The Woolworth Building was emptying... Abandoned...

Breathlessly I stood and gazed

upon the ghostly scene. The tremendous building towered there motionless. But presently I fancied it stirred; its graceful roof up there seemed swaying . . . Shifting . . . Or was it a trick of my straining vision? But then I saw it was not, for palpably the tower swayed . . . Leaned. Further—leaning until all at once I knew it could not recover . . . Poised, and then was toppling.

A breathless instant. Slowly at first, like a felled forest giant, the great structure was coming down. Slowly, then with a rush it fell to the south—fell in great shattering segments. Crashed with a soundless crash upon the several blocks of nearby buildings. Crashed and tore with the thousands of tons of its weight, smothering everything beneath its crashing masonry and steel. . . A soundless chaotic scene of ruin and death over all those city blocks, with huge rising clouds of dirt and smoke mercifully to obscure it.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RESCUING ARMY

I STOOD gaping, every sense within me shuddering at that soundless scene of ruin and death. And then it came upon me that now I could escape. Brutar had turned triumphantly to his underlings. I heard his voice: "The first success! Now let us try the others!"

No one seemed noticing me. I turned and swept myself away into the darkness. . .

I was aware of the grey outlines of New York floating by above me. . . A dim idea was in my mind that I must rejoin Will and Thone. . .

Out there beneath the Westchester

hills the silent mob of Brutar's ghostly followers still waited. Near them was the main body of his army, inactive, waiting here while he with his chosen few were experimenting upon New York!

Experimenting! This little experimental test, and it had brought down the Woolworth Building! What then would they do with a general attack?

I passed around the mob—silent, fleeing spectres—and sped again into darkness. With no conscious thought of passing time, or direction to my flight. Yet there must have been some instinct to guide me. The thought of Bee came strong. A growing triumph, a relief, told me I was nearing her; and I think now that it was her thought of me which guided my flight.

Darkness. But overhead lay the shadows of my own world. Winding grey hills; towns that lay like grey, colorless pictures in a book, queerly distorted as I looked, upward and through them. . .

Shadows like myself were advancing from the gloom in front of me! A little group; behind them a vague sweep of shapes stretching out to seem a throng, a multitude. Thone! Will and Bee—with the rescuing army of the Big-City behind them!

The rescuing army. . .

THERE came upon me with that meeting a great surging knowledge of my love for Bee. My love, born up there in my own world. And then, in the realm of the Egos, stripped of the physical, a changed love which had faded to a vague affection—a knowledge that she was dear to me, but nothing more.

Now—in the Borderland once more, at least of half material substance, a very human love descended

in a torrent. My arms went around her.

"Bee, my darling." And she responded to my caresses, kissing me with an eagerness, a longing undisguised. "Rob! I've been so frightened, not having you—" Murmured then that she loved me; and clung to me. . . The threshold of our own world.

But it was no time for love-making. I told Thone and Will what was transpiring, what already had come to pass, down there in New York. And with them we presently swept forward to the rescue.

Thone's army was at least as large as Brutar's; and it was not, like his, burdened by those who could not fight. In orderly array it advanced, and soon ahead of us we saw the shapes of Brutar's forces.

Strange ghostly battle into which now we plunged! I did not, could not fully understand it at the time—but now I think I do. The very essence of it a physical inactivity. Fighting! The word to our Earthly minds is so full of movement! Yet a man battling with himself, pitting the good against the evil within himself, may sit in his easy chair and fight a fierce fight.

So it was here; unleashed forces of the mind, grappling silently—a struggle without rules of combat in which no quarter could be given, and which could only end by complete annihilation of one side or the other. I knew all this, and standing with Bee, Thone and Will on a dark eminence above the scene, I watched, breathlessly.

We were under that same little Westchester town. Its streets and houses lay shadowy above us. Ghostly people were up there—thronging the streets—gazing down with fear

and awe at these flowing masses of ghosts advancing to battle.

The mob of Brutar's followers, frightened now, were huddled compactly. In area, they spread under perhaps half the village. And around them in a great concentric ring, Brutar's fighters massed. This movement Thone did not disturb.

"Let them," he said. "It's what I wish, to have them massed like that."

From our eminence—we were poised not very far beneath the ground level—we could see over the whole area of the battle which was proceeding below us. The central mob who could not fight; the ring of Brutar's soldiers; and surrounding that, at a distance of some five hundred feet, another ring, Thone's fighters who now were massing to the attack.

"What will they do?" I murmured. But no one answered me, and soon I was answered by the scene itself. From both sides—Thone's army and Brutar's—little waves of the Thought-substance were flowing out over that segment between the opposing rings. Like slow-floating wisps of grey smoke from the heads of the fighters. Flowing across the space between the lines. Materializing steadily. Solidifying until I could almost imagine it might become a grey wall. But this was an illusion. It was merely thought-antagonistic which would grip and hold like a net, no more.

The two opposing streams met in the center of that circular No-man's land between the lines. A chaos of blurred formless color was there. Not grey now. An angry red. The visible substances holding each other immovable. A boiling cauldron of red, with livid, lurid tongues like flame darting from it.

No sound. But I could feel it. A

mental distress, as even at this distance its influence swept me. An uneasiness; a depression; a vague sense within me of a growing panic.

It seemed a deadlock. And then began movement; strategic movement. From one portion of his line Thone suddenly withdrew a number of his thinkers. They came sweeping around to our side. With this reinforcement we became stronger over here, and the red chaos surged inward. I saw it flow almost to engulf the crouching Brutar fighters who were here opposing it. Saw a few of them fall—ghostly shells lying inert—and above them a something luminous, the Ego-mind deranged, unhinged, hovering, then winging away into death. . .

A shape hurriedly approached us; a man with harried, anxious face. "Thone! We are too weak now upon the other side. The Red Death is almost upon us there! They want the thinkers back."

Thone ordered them back. He turned to me. "We will win, Rob."

But I could not see it so.

"Look!" He gestured. "There is a haze above the red. It passes inward—can't you see that? And they cannot stop it. They have not been trained, for they do not know what it is."

Above the red seething ring, where the opposing thoughts were meeting, I saw as he said, a haze. It seemed a dim purple. It was floating up and inward. Very tenuous, hardly to be noticed. An imponderable something.

Thone said, "A quality of our thought which they cannot combat since they do not know what it is—or realize perhaps its presence. But its influence will reach them in time."

He swung upon the attentive shapes near us. "Oh!—give orders

not to hasten. Hold the deadlock. Keep them there. Do not hasten. We must drive up the others if we can. Brutar and the others—"

Brutar! His few picked men down there in New York working death and destruction! I had forgotten them completely. Thone issued other orders. "If thoughts of distress come from here—let the thoughts out. They may reach Brutar—bring him back to help his battle here. Let out their thoughts that way." He gestured toward New York. "And if we drive Brutar and his men up here, let them in."

Other orders. A hundred or two of our fighters withdrew from the line. One here and there, ceasing to fight, coming toward Thone, forming behind us. A picked force with which we were to descend into New York.

And soon, leaving the scene here, we sped under the grey shadows of Westchester, southward toward the city. And in time, came upon it. New York! Splendid giant. Like some great helpless lion standing harried. Cuffed, wounded, stricken. Unable to fight back. Amazed, bewildered, yet undaunted, ready to fight.

But helpless.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE STRICKEN CITY

THE little glowing bricks had been spread in scores of places. The acres of tumbled masonry which once reared aloft in proud splendor—the Woolworth Building—lay still smoking. Other buildings were down. Lower Manhattan—its pile of monuments to the engineering skill of man—was interspersed with areas of ruin. A smoke pall hung over everything. Through

it as we arrived I saw another giant building come down. . .

A warship lay in the upper harbor. Small boats were clustered around it. Over its decks and within its structure, men were frantically rushing. It stood there, a shadow on the shadowy water, the embodiment of impregnable power; the small anxious boats around it like milling pygmies trying futilely to help its distress.

Then men began pouring from it. The little boats took them and made off. Alone it lay there. Motionless. Then there came a surge of its giant bulk upward—a torrent waterspout as of a great mine exploding beside it. Bow down, it began to sink.

The Statue of Liberty fell. Head down, with torch plunging like a falling symbol. . .

The great Fort Wadsworth guarding the Narrows, as though an earthquake had torn it apart, rose and shook itself and fell into a shapeless mass. A small police boat was scurrying by in a panic. The tumbling white waves engulfed it. . .

The Brooklyn Bridge lay broken and fallen. Its dangling cables hung like rent cobwebs ripped apart by a giant, ruthless hand. . . Figures of men were clinging to parts of it.

Death, destruction everywhere. But there were soldiers grimly standing in Battery Park. Machine guns idly standing. Another warship, unattacked, belching belligerent smoke, moving majestically around the Battery from one river to another.

A harried lion. Undaunted. But helpless to fight.

BENEATH the shadows of the lower Hudson we came upon Brutar and his clustered cohorts. The devastation was slackening; the bricks had done their work. Brutar was doubtless thinking of rejoining

his people up there under the little Westchester town. He saw our shapes, and started north. We followed. Urging him on, but not attacking.

Thone began, "Once we get them all together up there—all of them together—" But he did not finish.

Our lines let them through. It was a crescent battle line now, open to the south. But when Brutar swept in we closed it as before.

The scene here had changed somewhat since we left it. The lurid red of the opposing thought-streams still held balanced between the lines of the fighters. But in one place it was indented now far into Brutar's territory—a red gash like a wound gaping amid his huddled throng. And I noticed, too, that the dim purple haze hung now like an aura close above the heads of our enemies.

I asked Thone about it. He said, "Those who are not fighters in there are beginning to feel our thoughts. Perhaps even they begin to suspect what awaits them. Soon the fighters also will know."

He spoke quietly, but on a note of calm certainty that in the end we would triumph. From that same height we watched the scene. Almost immovable, struggling ghosts—grey translucent shapes to my vision as now I regarded them. Yet—I wondered—were not those shapes of Brutar's people more solid than our own? A vague shudder mingled with triumph unholy, swept over me. Was it fancy, or was there indeed a change?

I could see Brutar, or at least a shape I assumed to be his, raised upon a height in the center of his forces; his arms waving; his soundless voice doubtless exhorting his fighters to greater effort. The fog of purple haze swirled about him,

tinging, but not obscuring, for it seemed utterly transparent. Was it my fancy that Brutar's shape was of changing aspect?

And then I was aware of an uneasiness growing in the mob huddled there in the midst of the fighting. A stirring. A ripple of movement. Spreading like the ripples of a pebble thrown into a pond; spreading until abruptly the mob was surging, struggling to break the bonds of its own protecting ring of fighters.

The fighters felt the press of the throng behind them. Their efforts wavered. With diverted minds their thought-stream weakened. At once the red tumult moved in upon them.

But Thone called his orders and a score of shapes relayed them throughout our circular investing ring. I could not understand it. We were not to press our advantage. Our fighters lessened visibly the strength of their attack. And our antagonists in a moment recovered.

Thone said quietly, "No, Rob—if we were to force in there now and overwhelm them, there would be many minds unhinged, but not driven irrevocably away. They might return. It is my aim to destroy them completely—mind and body—annihilation!"

Savage purpose, savagely expressed! But he added, "It is best—and I think, more merciful."

CHAPTER XX

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE GHOSTS

THERE came presently a sudden change to this silent battle. For the purely mental, abruptly was substituted a semblance of physical struggle. The two min-

gled. In the Ego-world it would not have been possible; but here in the Borderland, these bodies of half-material substance abruptly found themselves capable of it. From physical immobility there sprang movement. A panic at first; but Brutar quelled it, organized it into a concerted rush. His mob, his fighters, began pressing forward in a single direction. The Borderland slope lay well beneath the ground level of the village overhead; but off to the left there seemed an area in the outskirts of the town where the slope and the ground of Earth reached a common level. And Brutar's people were pressing that way.

They surged forward; were forced back—surging and rebounding as one would press against a yielding but entangling net. Our lines, and theirs, and the red tumult of conflict surged with them; bending, but the whole scene holding its contour. And I saw that very slowly, with each forward sweep and rebound they were gaining in their direction.

I heard Thone beside me addressing Will. "They will never make it. They will be too late." He seemed to realize something. "Those people up there in the town, Will—they must escape! Abandon the town! All of them escape—now before it's too late!"

Will said, "If we could only communicate with them. Do you suppose we could?" And Bee eagerly put in, "Let's try. Let Rob and me try. We will go up there to the level."

They explained it all to me then. Horrible, sinister, shuddering outcome! Growsome! Of course, the Earth-people in the town must escape. . .

Bee and I together took ourselves up the Borderland slope to the out-

skirts of the village where the slope was level with the ground. We were now half a mile beyond this spectral town which was thronged with ghostly vehicles and ghostly people staring in wonderment down at the battle scene.

WE came to the common level, stood upon a spectral road with a few wraiths of houses lining it. There seemed no people here—they were all crowding the town to gaze at the struggling ghosts directly beneath them there.

"No one is around here, Bee." But no sooner had I said it than we saw, standing by a fence nearby, a ghost warily regarding us. A man in uniform, a State trooper I thought. He appeared, standing there alone, to have no desire to approach us. But I waved. And Bee waved. We carefully advanced upon him—carefully, for fear of startling him into flight. Gesturing, smiling with every effort to appear friendly. He understood us at last; came to the middle of the road, and there we joined him.

Fantastic meeting! Ghosts, all of us, standing there in a group, gesturing. I put out my hand as a friend, and his came to meet it. Touched it? Had a billion million miles of Space and Eons of Time been between us we could hardly have been further apart!

But at last we made him understand. An ingenious fellow! He took a shadowy paper and pencil from his pocket and wrote what he thought we intended to convey to him; and we read it and nodded and smiled—grimly, for this was grim business indeed—grim, horrible!

When at last he knew, astonishment, terror was upon him. And he was off down the road at a run, waving his arms, shouting no doubt,

screaming to everyone his terrible warning....

We rejoined Thone upon the height overlooking the struggle. He murmured, "I see you were successful. And just in time—this is almost over now."

The battle lines still held. But what a change was come to our enemies! There was no mistaking it now—their bodies were materializing. The purple haze carrying the malignant influence of our fighters, was forcing their bodies into the Earth-state!...

The town above us, warned by our messenger was emptying. Vehicles—shadowy moving shapes of cars and wagons—were scurrying out of it over all the roads. The houses were empty; the roads all thronged with fugitives on foot. Empty-handed; and families trudging with what little worldly goods they could carry in their arms. Wagons and cars piled high with household furnishings hastily rescued. The lines of pedestrians urged, lashed to greater haste by frightened officials. An exodus from death into safety....

The end came suddenly, unexpectedly swiftly. Thousands of ghostly bodies, there beneath the ground of the village abruptly leaping over the last gap into material being. *In the ground*—the earth, the rock—the very atoms of these foreign bodies intermingled, blended to their essence with the atoms of the rock and soil. And suddenly leaping into solidity....

The scene everywhere seemed to shudder. Its grey details slurred into a blur, a formless chaos of power unleashed. A soundless rumble; a sweep of tumbling movement. Upward, with a burst; an infinity of newly created entities demanding space. Space! Demanding it; heaving up-

ward over the path of least resistance to find it. . . .

As though, there in the bowels of the earth a pent-up volcano had suddenly broken forth, the abandoned village heaved into the air; rose, shattered apart, and fell in a tumbled waste. An earthquake, a very cataclysm of nature outraged. . . .

A shattered, tumbled mass of wreckage where a moment before there had been a village. . . . Fire leaped to the last destruction. . . . Smoke rolled up in great spiraling clouds. . . .

And visible, down beneath the ruin, a ring of victorious shimmering ghosts, standing awed and alone in the empty darkness. . . .

CHAPTER XXI

EACH TO HIS OWN ALLOTTED PORTION

WE STOOD in the Borderland with Thone and Ala.

"You will not return to our Ego-world?" said Thone. It was a statement in tone, rather than a question. "You are right, friends. Each to his own, as the Creator intended. Your world, better for you—but ours, best of them all, for us."

Ala was standing close by Will. So near was she to our Earth-state, here in the Borderland, that I knew she had felt for Will those stirrings we call love. And now she was fighting them.

He touched her. "Could you not find it best to come with my sister and me, Ala?"

But she shook her head. "No. Father speaks truth. One should hold in contentment his allotted portion." But I think it tore at her with

a new, very human temptation. "Good-bye," she said resolutely.

It wrenched at us all. Friendship, even over so brief an interval, cannot be lightly broken. We told ourselves we would not break it. Some day, some time, we would again come together.

"Good-bye." Soundlessly it echoed within us. Will, Bee and I stood silent as we watched them trudge away into the shadows and the darkness.

Each to his own allotted portion.

Thone had assured us that our natural tendency of body would be to resume an Earth-existence from this adjacent Borderland. And Will had formerly returned and found it easier than staying. We located, after roaming a time, that corner of Will's own garden where the ground level of Earth coincided with the Borderland slope. . . .

Solidity! Again — at last — we were solid, human—wraiths no longer. Will had gone on into the house; Bee and I lingered in the garden. Blessed sounds and sights and odors. We could hear the murmur of insect life; hear the night breeze stirring the leaves, feel it fanning our hot cheeks. The roses and honeysuckle were heavily, thrillingly odorous. The moon bathed us with its pale silver fire.

I took Bee in my arms. She came, willingly, eagerly, trembling with this new-found world of love. And returned my kisses, and clung to me.

"Each to his own, Bee darling. How good this world of ours seems! I never appreciated it before. Did you?"

"No! No, never!"

But I appreciated it now.

THE END



Joe fell back, with his arm across his face, as the radiation flooded out.

POWER PLANT by LEE GREGOR

The plant would blow up in two minutes unless—

JOE STONE was working on top of one of the generators when Willard called him. From where he stood he could look across the tremendous backs of the machines, all the way over to the other end of the cavern, and he was beginning to be able to trace the patterns of the maze of tubes and pipes. The mistiness of the air had cleared

up; they had gotten the steam leaks under control, and the system, from the boilers that took off the heat wasted in the mercury turbines, to the condensers that tapped the cold underground river, was tight as a drum.

He saw Willard down there, at the side of the room, motioning for him to come down into the laboratory.

Joe waved back and replaced the hatch that covered the port through which he had been examining the exciter-field oscillators. He screwed it down and began to descend the ladder which clung to the side of the generator. Willard must be ready for more work, he thought. It took more time to set up the apparatus than to do the experiments, and it was a shame Willard didn't get more help. It was a very pretty machine he was going to have when he was through. It wasn't for nothing that the High Command allowed him the time, and half an assistant, and an insulated laboratory.

It was not a very pretty machine that was spread out over the tables and along half of a wall. Frankly, Joe thought, it looked a mess. But it was hardly the finished product. It was just about the middle of a big piece of research. Willard was soldering wires at the far end of the room, and his hands, so restless when not occupied, moved very swiftly and surely among the delicate instruments. Taber was at the workbench, filing down a piece of metal.

"I'll soon be ready," Willard said. "You handle the potentiometer and I will take the readings from this end. Run through it the same as last time."

Funny, Joe thought, as he worked. They spent so much time trying to learn how to get atomic energy. Now they have had it for a while and we spend all this time trying to learn how to stop it. No doubt, though, there would be an advantage in being able to stop an atomic generator at a distance. At a good distance. We could win the war just like that. Simple enough.

But this job right here isn't so simple. You don't go about it the obvious way. You might think that

you should neutralize the exciter field to stop the disintegration, and, true, you might possibly do things to a generator by messing around with the exciter field, but it was something difficult to handle. No, what you wanted to do was to eliminate the softener field, the space strain that put the atoms into a condition to be destroyed easily by the exciter field. The energy went off mostly as heat, some as high frequency rays, in these old machines here, and you had to run mercury and steam turbines with them, but with the new machines you could pick the energy right off.

So the work went. It was monotonous, and the only sounds were the scratching of Willard's pencil, the occasional hum of a machine, the dry sound of a word of instruction.

And then there was the heart-tearing, frightening sound of the alarm siren, the noise of shouting voices muffled by the insulating walls, the change in the rhythms of the generators, the flaring of the red light on the laboratory instrument panel.

JOE stood still; his stomach felt tight and there was a constriction around his chest. The roar of the generators outside rose imperceptibly in pitch and created a tension that stopped his breath.

"Switch off the oscillator," Willard said, as he moved over to the wall panel on which the red light shone. Willard studied the meters and the line on the recording radiometer. His hands were quite still, and there was only an in and out motion of the muscle in his cheek as he ground his jaws together.

Taber stood by the workbench, waiting for something else to happen, just like they all were. The

sound of the shouting voices began to die out.

Willard said nothing, but he walked over to a computing machine; calmly it seemed, but very quickly. He began punching, and was soon finished.

"It is a very rough estimate," he said. "I have thought all along they might do this, but I suppose I was too interested in what I was doing to follow the other line, for it is the opposite of what I was trying to do." He spoke more and more rapidly, as though he were trying to excuse himself for something. "We were trying to extinguish the softener field. They—the enemy—have done the opposite. They have sent down on us from somewhere above, perhaps from a ship, perhaps from the moon (I don't know how much power they have) an exciter field that increases the disintegration in the power plant to a rate that increases with a curve that will cause the power plant to explode in ten minutes, plus or minus one minute. The secondary radiations from the generators are penetrating the generator insulation with a strength that makes impossible more than momentary life outside of the laboratory insulation." He stopped.

The three of them then thought, and there was an intensity and coldness of logic about those thoughts that drove very quickly to a conclusion that was inevitable and inescapable.

Taber thought: In ten minutes the power plant will blow up, and that will be the end of this entire sickening business. The colonists will win the war, and all the right they have for that.

Willard thought: In ten minutes the power plant will blow up, and my damper will be destroyed, and with it will be destroyed the hopes of bring-

ing the war to a quick and victorious end.

Joe Stone thought: In ten minutes the power plant is going to blow to hell, and all of us with it, unless a person goes out of the laboratory to switch off the softener field, which would make the exciter field useless, no matter how strong. But that person would die.

What was he doing here, he continued the thought savagely. Why was it he that was down here in the clammy underground factory instead of on top where a person could live and fight and die as he had been taught a person should? Three weeks ago he had had thoughts like that. Three weeks ago he had stood at the entrance to the passageway halfway up the side of the hill. It had been raining, and across the valley the parallel Appalachian ridge could barely be seen through the thick air. The road up which he had been driven wound closely around the side of the hill and disappeared around the bend a hundred yards away. The trucks had gone on, leaving Joe and twenty others standing in the rain before entering the tunnel.

He allowed his face to get wet, and the water trickled down his cheeks feeling very cool and fresh. It would be warm always once he was inside, and he did not know when he would be allowed to come out again. So for a few moments he stood there and once again tried to puzzle things over.

AM I lucky or not, he thought. Am I luckier than my friends who were taken into the army and shipped off to Venus six months ago to fight the war? Was it good that I was better than they at physics and mathematics and therefore sent to tech school to study atomic engi-

neering so that I would be able to run the power plants that supplied the munitions factories? Is it right that because I was better than they, that they should have the excitement and adventure of the army, while I must go below into the hot factory to slave over the dirty power plant?

To him, naturally, the army was excitement and adventure. That was what he had been taught. That was what they had all been taught.

So this mixed him up, and he stood there and once again the questions buzzed round and round his head, without end and without solution. What had been the use of his working so hard, if this was the net result?

What was the use? What was the value? What was the purpose? They had never been answered, although Mary had been able to help him without exactly giving answers. She had been able to buoy him up with some reserve of feminine certainty, and had convinced him that he was doing the right thing, and she had kept him from thinking too much. Now she was not here; he would not see her for a long time, and the confusion was returned to his mind.

Well, the door was open, and the little group trooped into the tunnel. The lieutenant at the desk within checked over their papers and gave each a destination tag. They walked a little way into the mountain and climbed aboard a monorail car.

The track led downward in a series of curves. At each of the several stops the car made, one or two of the recruits climbed out. Joe was left, finally, and he rode on into the depths below the mountain. The tunnel slipped by; its walls were unfinished rock shining with hanging water. The black of anthracite coal occasionally lined the tunnel; Joe re-

called that there had been coal mines here.

With a shock of booming sound and glaring light the power plant suddenly spread out before the car. The cavern was huge, and the opposite walls were dim from the mist in the air. The boilers and turbines filled the floor with their massive-ness, and the whitely insulated pipes spun a complex web through the chamber. The roaring generators stung his ears, and it was a sound that he was to hear constantly. It beat down on his head, it made the air heavy, it oppressed him and made his heart pump fiercely.

That was the first sight Joe had had of the big place, and as he stood now in the swift silence of the laboratory he still had time to recall the dismay with which he had viewed the clumsy, monstrous mercury and steam boilers with their spinning turbines.

"Gawd," he had said to Martin, the corporal who had met him and was leading him to the quarters through the jungle of machinery. "This place is an antique."

"Sort of," Martin smiled. "It was left over from the last war. But we still manage to squeeze a billion or so horsepower out of it. We have been having some trouble with the steam turbine system. The place is steamed up like a Turkish Bath." He pointed to the drops of water clinging to the metal plates and pipes.

"It feels like one." Joe dragged out a handkerchief and wiped his face with it. "Bathing suits seem to be in season."

Martin's face suddenly turned wistful. "I haven't been swimming for a year and a half. I was district champion—four hundred meter free style. I can't wait to get back into

the water. Think the war will be over soon?"

"To hear my crowd talk before they embarked for Venus, the war was going to be over very shortly after they landed. I sort of wish I was with them. It won't be much fun down here."

"Oh, we manage. It gets tiresome after a time. For we are short-handed, and to get leave is like busting an atom with a nutcracker, even a chromium-plated one."

Then they had entered the living quarters, which were air conditioned, and vastly more comfortable than the plant itself. There had been the going around to all the people and shaking hands and hearing their names and forgetting them, and hearing the clatter of table tennis balls and the jangle of year-before-last's songs on the phonograph, and smelling the dinner cooking.

Say, this isn't so bad, he thought. A person could have a decent time down here. The work is hard, the people swell, the books in the book-case—but what happens when you have read all the books twice and know all the records by heart?

HE came to know Taber at the first dinner. Taber, with the massive head and the twisted, useless leg. Taber was a character. All of them down there imitated him—his cynicism and his vulgar humor—for they thought it was clever, but they didn't know what it was all about. It was what Taber showed him at that first dinner for which he would always remember him.

The dinner plates had rattled back to the dishwashing machine, and the beercans were on the table as Taber showed Joe how to fold beercans in his hands. "You see, you hold the seam away from you, place the tips

of your fingers on the seam, and the heels of your hands on the can as the fulcrum of a lever, and you push with your arms instead of trying to squeeze just with the muscles of your hands. No, you don't have the trick yet. When you can't squeeze any more cans flat, then you know you have had enough beer."

That was Taber. It was so humorless above. The wars after wars, the strictness of the government, the constant militarism, had kept things grey, and while there was plenty of fun it was of a frantic, hilarious sort, not this sober kind of humor that you felt pretty deep but did not laugh at much.

So now where was the humor? What did Taber's humor say when the word *now* was measured in ten minutes? And what did Willard's science have to say concerning the sudden breaking off of the world line ten minutes ahead of you?

Willard hadn't belonged down here in the first place. Lord knows I was satisfied to teach atomic physics at the university, but they needed someone to run the power plant, so they made me a captain and here I am. I had an idea, and they thought it was nice, so they gave me a laboratory insulated from the secondary radiations that might leak through the generator screens. So I worked on this, and did not think too much about the rightness of war. Taber was the one who did that. Enough for three people. How he pounced on Joe the first day Joe was here and commenced the same old argument.

"What news is there from the top?" he asked Joe after dinner. "You're the first new man in a month. Tell us everything."

And the others crowded around, literally hungry for gossip from above.

"What could I tell you that you don't know? You have radios and newspapers."

"Ah, son. Censored down to the advertisements. Don't you know? Minor skirmishes inflated to decisive battles if we win, desultory firing mentioned along the border if we lose a three-month campaign. But haven't you heard anything real? What about the end? What are the plans?"

"The end? Why, we beat Venus and win, that's all. What more could there be?"

"Ah, what's the use? You've just come out of school, with all the pap they taught you still in your head. They never mention whether a real victory is possible or not; what kind of peace could be made to ensure against another war just like this in another fifty years."

Joe was bewildered. "If we beat them, how can there be another war?"

"And they said the same at the end of every war, from the beginning of time."

"At it again, Taber?" That was Willard, entering the room with his booming voice and hands that moved constantly as if with an excess of nervous energy.

"While there's life there's an argument," Taber misquoted, cheerfully. "There's no fun arguing with you anymore. I've gone through the field completely, and you are as stubborn as an ox and still persist in the foolish belief that Earth ought to defeat the Venerean colonists."

He paused for a moment to become amused at the shocked expression that came over Joe's face.

"Oh-ho. The schoolboy is shocked. Just like I'd said a four-letter Anglo-Saxon word in the presence of his best girl. What a mass of condition-

ings and inhibitions they make of the youngsters nowadays. I know," he looked at Joe, "exactly what you believe about the war. That bookcase over there is full of the books which have become the brains of the schoolboys of today. You believe that the colonists on Venus are engaged in a rebellion with the intention of finally conquering Earth. You believe that the colonists, because of the primitive conditions on Venus, and because the toughest had to survive, have degenerated into semi-civilized people with the advantages of a few machines. You believe that their barbarism, if not checked, will overrun the solar system with its vicious ways. And therefore Earth must completely and totally conquer Venus.

"The only trouble with that is—I was on Venus for ten years, and I know exactly how things are. The colonists are tough, yes. No more barbaric than any pioneers. And they were lucky enough—oh, what a marvelous accident—to have a pair of really honest men to lead them through the beginning."

"PRATT and Zanderfeldt!" Joe gasped. "Those..."

"Mind what you say about them," Taber snapped. "What do you know about them except what the people who write the books care to tell you? It is no wonder that the Venereans became sick and tired of being tied up to Earth, robbed and exploited up and down the line."

"Suppose we break it up," Willard then said. "Stone hasn't even seen where he is going to sleep, and you shouldn't subject him to all this on the first day. There's plenty of time later. All the time in the world."

But now there was only ten min-

utes. Ten cold minutes that throbbed at the three of them in rhythm with the crescendo of the generators outside. Ten minutes that depended upon the pull of a switch and the burning away of a life.

Taber thought: Damned if I'll do it and cause the colonists to lose.

Willard thought: I can't go. My machine is not yet finished, and I must remain to complete the work so that we will be able to end the war.

Joe Stone thought: I don't want to go. It's cutting me off too short.

If one of us does not go then we're all done for.

Willard put out a tentative feeler. "If someone went out and switched off the softener field the power plant would be saved."

"One of us, that would have to be," Taber said. "There is nobody living out there."

"That puts the problem in its most concise form," Willard stated.

"Like a problem in sophomore philosophy," Taber grinned. "I'll tell you right now. I won't go. You have known me for a long time. You know that I never believed in this war in the first place, and I was lucky to have a bad leg so that they didn't want me for the army and I didn't have to act the objector and get clapped in jail or shot. You know I have always thought the colonists were in the right, and that the war was an aggression upon them. You don't expect me to act heroic and give myself up in order to cause their defeat."

"You fool," Willard shouted. "What a low thing it is for you to sit there speaking your false ideas when such a tremendous issue is at balance. So many lives will be lost."

"A marvelous balance it is, where one person with the proper realistic

ideas may swing the course of the entire war to the proper ending. Why don't you do it?"

"Because I haven't finished my work. If this machine is successful we can stop the war very quickly with the saving of many lives, for all the machines are dependent upon atomic energy, and they could not change rapidly enough. If I am killed now before the machine is completed, the war may not be finished for a long time, and thousands of lives will be lost in the meantime, and neither we nor the colonists will win in the long run."

"Your ways of thinking are very clearly shown by the manner in which you said, 'we can stop the war,' instead of, 'the war can be stopped.' I can't help in a thing like that."

Nobody said anything for a while, and the drone of the generators increased in pitch so that the tension was unbearable. All the while Joe had been standing there, his gaze snapping from one face to the other as they talked, and the expression on his own face had changed from shock to amazement to scorn and to rage.

"**W**E have only *four* minutes now, plus or minus one minute, Mister Willard," he said, and his voice was terribly tight. "And the two of you have been conversing most philosophically in the most beautiful, logical language, and have stated your points very clearly and decisively, and so now there is nothing to do but wait for the remaining three and a half minutes, plus or minus one minute, to swing by, and then we shall all be finished, and we shall never worry about how the war ended, and we shall never have any more arguments."

"But how about me? I am being

cheated. I have given a lot, a hell of a lot, so that I could be here instead of in a uniform with the common soldiers. I have worked very hard at studying, for I had to learn very fast, and I worked and ate and slept and worked and ate and slept again, and got little enjoyment out of it, and I was paid nothing for it, except by the thought that when it was over I would be in a better position than the common soldiers. For the past two years I have not lived as a person should live, and I cannot say that before that I lived very well either. But I expected something for all of that later. I expected that finally, sometime, I would be able to relax and enjoy what there was to enjoy. Now if things are going to be cut off short all of *my* work will have been wasted. You speak of your work being wasted, Mister Willard, but my work was just as important to *me*, and right now, *me* is what counts the most, for up to now there has been no *me*, but only a lot of work.

"So if I get chopped off it will all have been wasted, and I do not like waste." And he was very angry right then, for his face was white and his slender body trembled.

Taber gazed keenly at Joe and said, sympathetically, "Yes, you have a great right to be angry. But yours is a matter of emotion, and when it is all over you will no longer be an-

gry. Mine is a matter of logical necessity, and concerns a subject which is of great importance. The freedom of Venus depends upon their success in this action."

"Damn your logic!" Joe Stone cried. "Your whole stinking, cold-blooded, traitorous mass of falsities. Don't you think that if Venus had the damper also, it would stop the war on both sides at once and they would have something to say about the peace that was made?"

He violently wrenched open the thick door that led to the power plant, and fell back with his arm over his face as a crackling sheet of air-ionizing radiation flooded in from the tortured generators.

"No! You can't go out!" Taber sprang forward to stop him.

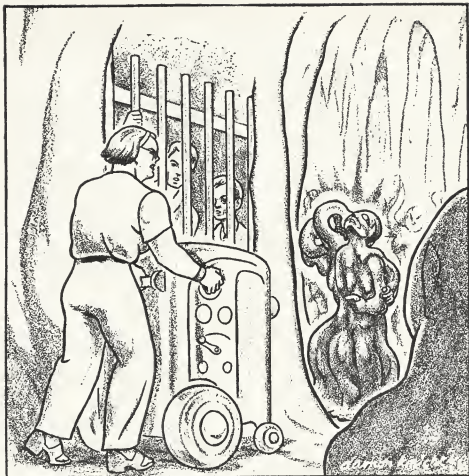
"Don't touch me!" Joe twisted out of Taber's grip.

The twist and the fault of Taber's trailing foot threw Taber to the floor, and he was in the path of the radiations. Taber's skin began to darken immediately under the terrific beating, and his face contorted from the burning.

"All right. I'm cooked." And he could still grin at the joke. "I'll pull the switch. I'll save your silly lives and your silly world. If what you just said about Venus possessing the damper can be true, then make sure it becomes true."

He disappeared through the door.

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EPHONY'S SPECTACLES

They'd left Femintown, Mars, at full speed because their lives wouldn't be worth much if the Martiennes caught them—but when they met the Selans they wished they were back!

I QUIT!" I bawled out, thumping the bar top with such gusto that I was compelled to tell the barkeep that it was a mistake, I didn't want anything. "Yes," I reflected somewhat softer, a bit dampened by the glare in the barkeep's one good eye, "it's quit—or go nuts!"

I mutter to myself after the fifth; you can imagine my condition when I begin shouting. I was near the bottom of the ninth when I reached my decision—a decision I'd made about seventy times. I was on the verge of telling the barkeep about it, decided that maybe he wouldn't give a damn about hearing it anyway, and

by **CLARENCE GRANOSKI**

was just turning myself over on the bar when Ephony's huge head entered accompanied by his diminutive body.

He looked funny to me at first; I didn't get the connection until later, however, since he makes quite an impressive sight in his baggy gray suit, long yellow shoes, multi-colored necktie and those vast, innocent, popping blue eyes. There's really a long story about his gorgeous lamps; I have an idea they're two reasons why Juanita chases the poor devil all over Creation.

Ephony appeared to be somewhat excited.

I couldn't understand how anyone could possibly get excited on Iapetus. Hell, even the best joints in Vo-con—the little city we were stationed near—held very little interest for me. Frankly, I appreciate feminine beauty, with a sprinkling of Yuvac—and the former was sadly missing. There are times when I wish I were still in Femintown, Mars. Now there is a place! Thirty-seven beautiful girls who—let's see, I was saying that Ephony entered the spacemen's bar.

He made it to the bar without faltering, draped across it like he'd seen others do—I never drape across a bar—and wheezed into my astonished face: "I made it! I—I escaped!"

I wasn't too far gone. Recollection dawned. I got the connection. Juanita! I hazarded: "How in hell did you do it?"

Momentarily, Ephony looked hurt. You can imagine what he'd look like, what with his big blue eyes and nice, shiny moon-face.

"Please—no swearing," he said softly—so that the crazy barkeep wouldn't hear, I suppose. Ephony was nice about that kind of thing;

he'd never bawl out a member of his crew in public. He was the boss, you understand—when Juanita wasn't around. "It wasn't easy," he continued. "Juanita took my glasses—said she wanted them for an experiment—and then took a nap. Clever girl, Juanita! But that didn't stop me. I had my share of troubles getting here without them—" Ephony heaved a deep sigh of relief, "—but I made it!"

That was quite obvious. I'd figured that out when I first saw him. But the startling fact remained that he had actually accomplished the impossible. He was out! Free! When Ephony can successfully evade the clever and watchful Juanita, something simply must be done. Things progressed nicely. I made a suggestion. A celebration in honor of our last day on Iapetus. Ephony loves celebrations. Like I've said before, I'm probably the best guzzler in the system. I've even drunk Venusians under tables—big tables at that—and most of those moisture-soaked walking fish veritably live on the stuff.

Stuff? Well, frankly, Yuvac—the finest, most potent, deadliest—oh, hell! Ever been hit on the head with an eighteen-pound mallet? Same thing!

At that moment I forgot all about quitting the Ephony Entomological Expedition.

"Yuvac!" I yelled. "Four jugs!"

The barkeep complied hurriedly. I get a kick out of those apetusians—the way they get around on their four tendril-like legs. Other than their legs, they look very much like Earthlings. All, that is, except Ephony. He's different, somehow.

WHEN we finally left the spacemen's bar we had two jugs left. I remember that much since I

was elected to carry them. Ephony fell out of the doorway just ahead of me. I followed suit. And then the sun went out—just like that! At the time I thought it was damn peculiar. Even in the perpetual twilight area around Vo-con it couldn't have gotten that black. I was thinking that Saturn's suffused rays should have taken up the slack.

"A fine thing, Ephony," I steamed as I fell out the door. "No lights..."

That's the last I remember until I woke up in the cavern of the Selans.

"Ephony!" I bawled out. "Ooohhh, Ephonyyyyyyy!"

No answer.

My eyes focused. In the dim light of the radium lamps I saw a dark huddle nearby. Ephony was still out—cold. Yuvac was like that; the things it can accomplish are simply miraculous.

"I'm a persistent sort of a cuss. So I bawled out a second time: "Ephonyyyy!"

Success at last! His befuddled brain registered the call; he stirred; and then he turned a pair of bleary eyes toward me.

"What—what in—in—hell—happened?"

You know what I told you about Ephony's ideas toward swearing. When he uses such strong words—wow! Yuvac really gives him the works.

"Yuvac," I groaned back, "don't you remember?"

Ephony carefully rubbed his hands across his face.

"Yuvac?... Oh, now I remember. Of course. The Earth II. Juanita. My escape... Hey!" He was on his feet in a second. "Hey! Do you know where we are?"

"Yeah," I muttered. "Femintown."

"Femintown, nothing!"

"What! No girls?"

"No! No girls. Selans!"

Let me tell you about the Selans. They're nice little fellows—a cross between a cobra and Tyrannosaurus Rex. They resemble lapetusians, with the exception that they have four tendril-like arms to match their four legs, and are only about four feet in height. Pygmies—but what a variety! I've been around; I've seen plenty of junk in the System; I've matched myself with about everything from the Giant Amoebae of Mercury to the Bat-Men of the Moon, but I'll never forget those little radium-filled Selans who inhabit the amygdaloid caverns of Saturn's moon, Iapetus.

Ephony told me about them. That stuff is right down his alley. He even captured one—that is, Juanita captured it after the crew failed—and put it in a special lead chamber on the Earth II. He explained to me that their entire systems are comprised mostly of radium. They even eat radium salts; their caverns are full of it—in the lower levels, where Earthmen dare not go.

And to make matters more complicated, the little fellows have the very bad habit of disappearing. Ephony figured that out, too. They are in possession of some type of electrical device that reacts with the radium in their bodies in such a way as to make them actually vanish! So you can imagine how tricky they are. Funny thing, the one Ephony had in the lead chamber was invisible half the time. It would be darned awkward to have something like that on display in a zoo, wouldn't it?

Let's see. Where was I? Oh, yes....

I WAS on my feet the instant Ephony spoke.

"Selans?"

"Look," he cried out, pointing to the wall. "The date and time. I marked it there when we left the place."

Then I remembered. I'm a regular elephant—my memory is simply phenomenal. We'd left the caverns of the Selans in a hurry. To sum up, we'd taken flight! For some reason—maybe because we'd swiped one of their members—the little Selans were mad at us. They're hard to get along with, anyway. I didn't like the situation. I've been chased out of plenty of respectable places—like barrooms; but I hated like the very devil to be run out of a dirty cavern. And without as much as an inkling of ceremony. Things like that will grate on a man's pride, won't it?

I snapped out of it. "Let's get out!"

Ephony had the same idea.

We got—just as far as the first archway of the first cavern we crossed. We met a stone wall—in the form of an army of Selans!

We were all done. They were ready for us. And I dimly sensed that we'd been tricked—when the Yuvac wrapped itself around us in Vo-con. Yup! That was it! Conspiracy! Sabotage! A fifth columnist—that barkeep!

"Ephony! It's the pay-off!"

Ephony was trembling as he'd never trembled before. Wait! He'd done better one other time—when the Martian girls were going to knife us. But now he was doing a fine job again. I won't tell you what I was doing. Things like that don't make good reading.

Here we were. Threatened by the paralyzing rays of the Selans, who

were infuriated, I knew blamed well, because we'd stolen one of their inhabitants to take back to earth. The tiny guns were trained on us. That's an annoying situation, any way you look at it—and we were looking down the barrels. I glanced around, looking for an out. Not a chance. Juanita was still napping back in the Earth II. One thing about Juanita that deserves slight mention is her dependability. It's just marvelous. Like Gibraltar. Yes, she's a great girl. Great big and—but that has nothing to do with the Selans.

One second they stood watching us. Then they vanished. And at the same instant we were completely overrun by the invisible little creatures.

It was just beautiful while it lasted. I'll bet it would have looked like a grand exhibition of calisthenics by two madmen—two of us going through a gob of gyrations against what would look like thin air!

I didn't see what Ephony did. I believe he handled the situation quite well; he was probably as cool and collected as I was. I swore and kicked and squirmed and cursed and bit and tore. I don't go in much for those so-called rules of good sportsmanship. And neither do the Selans. Maybe they never heard of them. If they did, I'll bet they still figure I didn't.

Twisting, weaving, rolling, kicking—yes, I kicked! Most of the time I kicked empty air, and was partially thankful that my legs didn't fly away, but a few beauties landed. I hope a few of those little rascals still carry the bruises. It was great; the finest, dirtiest, meanest mess I've ever encountered. And so it ended. Ephony was in the same fix I was in. We got took. We were flat on our backs. The Selans wrapped us

into neat bundles with some peculiar type of cord, and dumped us in a nearby cavern. Then those invisible Selans vanished—I hope you can follow me—and we were alone.

"Nice fight," I hazarded.

"Not a chance in the world without my glasses," Ephony speculated.

"Glasses! Hell! They were just invisible!"

Ephony grasped the situation. He's quite clever and quick about that sort of thing. "No wonder I couldn't see them. . . ."

"Oh, for a jug of Yuvac."

"Juanita would be better," Ephony suggested.

I agreed with him, only Juanita couldn't possibly be put in a jug. Why, a barrel wouldn't be big enough—unless it was custom-made. I said as much.

"For one thing, Ephony, when you marry Juanita you'll never have to worry about a bodyguard. The IP Ground Crew at Jovopolis has nothing on Juanita. Trouble is—she's taking a nap. Damn poor time to take a nap, I'd say. . . ."

FOR some time we said nothing. I have an idea Ephony was thinking about the same thing I was—that if there are people with futures like bright stars on Life's Horizon, ours were a couple of dead suns. Then another thought came along. I echoed it. "Yup! I'm going to quit. I'm going to cut it out."

"Cut what? These cords?"

"No—Yuvac."

"Sure. I know you will," Ephony peeped back. "I remember you were—Wait! Wait a minute!" His voice rose like Big Ben on New Year's Eve. "Do you hear it. . . .?"

"Hear what? I don't—" And then I did! A weird calling deep in my

brain. Eerie. Fantastic. A tiny voice calling for attention!

Ephony must have realized what it was. Like I've said, he's clever as hell.

"Telepathy," he announced. "Quiet."

I was quiet, listening to the little voice.

"Earthmen," it was saying, "we demand the release of one of our members now a captive on your ship. You shall have your freedom when he is returned to us."

Silence followed—a dead, heavy silence.

"Encouraging piece of business," I finally reflected. "We can't get out to get their crazy Selan, and he can't get back until we get out."

Ephony didn't say anything.

The little voice did not return.

I found myself wishing Juanita would snap out of it—and swore roundly. The air got so thick with my choice profanity that it could have been hacked into chunks with a sword and carried outside. Then, quite suddenly, I quit. Ephony was nodding at me significantly. I caught on. He had somehow managed to loosen the cords around his wrist; in a moment his hands were free. Quietly, and with a number of surreptitious glances around the cavern, he freed himself. Then he untied me. Fortifying ourselves with the thought that we were alone—though one of those crazy invisible Selans may have been there all the time—we stood up.

I wobbled a little; Ephony promptly fell flat on his face; I helped him up.

"Cramps," he groaned softly. "I can't stand having my hands and feet tied for any length of time."

Imagine that! Hell—I can't stand being tied up at all. I didn't open a

discussion on that. Time was precious. We had to get going. I knew the Selans were desperate—that it was a question of our safety or the safety of the little fellow back on the Earth II. And at the time we weren't concerned with the little fellow in the lead chamber. I was thinking seriously about maintaining my own good health. So we scrambled out of that cavern—and through several more. Not that we knew where we were going. That was inconsequential. Point was, we simply had to go!

Finally we entered a black tunnel. Now that tunnel is something to talk about. I've encountered nothing that will compare with the blackness of that Selan tunnel. It was solid; it was thick; it was so heavy that we could feel it pressing against us. Even our breathing seemed labored and difficult. But maybe I just thought that because Ephony was leading me by the hand—and racing through that tunnel like a buzz-saw.

I thought dimly about running blindly into some hidden pit. And pouring into my mind along with the pit came also the idea that maybe dropping into something like that wouldn't be so nice. The fall itself I could take—but I didn't like the idea of the sudden stop at the bottom. Well, maybe the bottom would be soft—soft and full of friendly reptiles!

I voiced my opinion; but before Ephony could answer, we sprawled headlong into a brightly illuminated cavern. And in the same instant, the place was alive with Selans!

Our escape was nipped in the bud; we were trapped! No matter what you call it, we were in a barrel of oil. And hot oil at that. For now—of all things!—the little Selans were

really mad. This time they made a real business of it. They may have had a vague idea that we were trying to escape. Can you imagine that?

IT was the end! I could feel it—I see it—smell it. I didn't look at Ephony. I simply closed my eyes and started in. My fists met a whole gob of the little fellows. They liked to fight, too. Their fists met me. It was fortunate that quarters were close, since that precluded the possibility of the tiny paralyzing guns coming into action.

I love a good fight—if I'm not too much involved. I don't mind black eyes—if they're on somebody else. But this was nip and tuck. And I got nipped. Trouble was, the Selans had four fists per man—and I only had two. A distinct disadvantage. Then too, they were mad. A distinct advantage. I wasn't mad yet—I had just begun to swear though, and that's a good sign.

I had no opportunity to take time out to see what Ephony was doing, though I'm convinced he gave a good account of himself. Selans were simply pouring over me; fists were dropping on my head like raindrops.

And then—Hell!—the *expected!*

The Selans disappeared!

"Ooohhhh!" howled Ephony. "My glasses!"

I bellowed and puffed and blew: "Glasses, hell! They've done that Houdini on us again. And it's unfair to — to pugili — pug-gill-i- — pega —Damn the luck! It's unfair to fighters!"

Ephony was moving one way around the cavern. I was going the other. We didn't have a great deal of choice. The invisible Selans were good fighters. And they were consistent. They were hanging on our

necks. On our backs. On our feet. We were raising more dust in that cavern than you'll ever find on a Kansas Prairie.

Finally we all met again in one grand melee on the opposite side of the cavern. Then, too late, I realized we'd been tricked again. Cleverly, we were both forced into a small cavity at the side. The moment we were inside, a flock of iron bars descended from above. Prisoners!

Now there is a delicate situation. Crammed in a tiny four-by-four, just high enough to stand up in, and looking out through iron bars at invisible Selans—oh, I know I'm going crazy. But that's the way matters stood.

Then the Selans materialized again.

And at that same instant the silence was shattered by a terrific howl from that black tunnel across the cavern. I heard the blowing of big powerful lungs. The pounding of huge feet. My heart skipped with sheer joy. I knew what was coming. Our liberator!

A cloud of dust came out of the tunnel.

The Selans disappeared again.

Juanita charged in like an infuriated bull elephant. And the howl on her lips! I've heard the blood-curdling wail of the Akiir deep in Mercurian jungles; I've listened many nights to the horrid, rasping cry of the Girad on the plains of Jupiter. But I swear I've never heard anything as horrible as I heard that day in the Selan Cavern. It required but a single glance to tell me that Juanita was mad—as mad and as dangerous as I've ever seen her.

I wish I could describe her—but that's impossible. Words haven't been coined to do it; and, frankly, I'm unable to coin them myself. Let's see, we were discussing Juanita.

She must weigh all of two hundred. And with a peculiar silver band around her short, bobbed hair—which was nearly standing on end—she looked like she'd just come from a Sunday School picnic that had gone awry. To top it off, she was wearing Ephony's glasses—and they were painted blue!

JUANITA just gave us a casual glance—one of those "I'll take care of you later" things—and went to work. Those poor Selans! Frankly, I shivered. I hate to admit it, but it's true. Like a mighty magnet will attract an iron nail, my eyes were fastened on the amazing Juanita.

Juanita is methodical, when there's work to be done. She had one of the Earth II's portable x-ray projectors, and was directing it around the cavern as though actually shooting the invisible Selans with the rays. Then I realized that she was doing just that!

To make matters more mysterious, chunks of good, common earth lead began to appear around the cavern. I couldn't figure it out. I was on the point of blaming Yuvac again. Yuvac will do things like that. Then I decided that if ever I got out, I'd quit the crazy Triple F before I went nuts. I even began to think that I was on a thru-street for an asylum. First I couldn't understand what did happen; then I saw things that couldn't happen.

"Yup!" I blurted. "I'm going screwy!"

Ephony didn't hear me. At least, he didn't answer.

Juanita just tossed me another of her "pipe down, mutt," glances and kept playing that projector around the cavern. When finally she stopped, the cavern floor was covered with lead chunks.

Then she thumped over to our cage, released and lifted the iron bars. I know it would have taken six ordinary men to lift them. Ephony and I staggered out. And as soon as Ephony was clear of the bars, Juanita grabbed him by the collar. He was in the soup again.

"Snap out of it," she bellowed. "We've got to get out of here before the rest of the Selans catch on."

We agreed with her. For one thing, it was good common sense. For another, we had no choice.

We ran. That race out of those caverns is something for the book—for two books. Several times we thought we were trapped. On three occasions we met a group of Selans, who promptly vanished. But they never got us. Juanita turned the x-ray on them—I couldn't understand how she was able to see those invisible Selans when I couldn't—and—presto!—they were chunks of lead.

Damned mysterious business, I kept telling myself. But I'm an intelligent sort. I keep my big mouth shut—when Juanita is around.

We popped out of the Selan Caverns at break-neck speed, and even though my eyes were unaccustomed to the brighter light, I could make out Vo-con in the distance, and far toward our left, across an open stretch of country, I recognized the Earth II!

"Oooohhhh, Ephonyyyy!" I bawled out. "Light! The lights are on again!"

Juanita glared at me. I took the wisest, safest course. I pulled in my neck.

"Quick!" Juanita bellowed commands. "We've got to make the ship in a hurry. The Selans may follow."

As I've said many, many times, when Juanita barks an order, things

happen. I sincerely doubt that our speed record from the mouth of the Selan Caverns to the Earth II will ever again be duplicated. And I never believed big people could travel! I've heard that elephants, huge as they are, can approach the speed of an express train. Well, they have nothing on Juanita. You should have seen her that day. She beat me to the ship. And at that, she was dragging poor Ephony in her wake.

IT was about a quarter of a million miles later, when the Earth II was again heading toward the inner planets, before I recovered my senses enough to reach a decision. My old decision—quit or go nuts. You'll have to admit I'm consistent. But I laughed at myself as I started along the catwalk toward the forward control room. I knew damned well I wouldn't quit the Triple E. Things were just too interesting. But I did think that an explanation of some sort might be in order.

I didn't have to ask for one. When I got into the control room I thought for a moment I'd entered a kindergarten. It was the old iron door again. Ephony and the crew were lined up against the wall. Juanita's hands were on her hips. She was really giving the boys the well-known works.

I just slid silently into line and listened.

"It was all very simple," she was blowing, "but who could expect any of you men—you 'scientists'—to figure it out? I learned it from our captive, by mental telepathy. Maybe I bribed him a bit more than I expected, but it was necessary.

"The Selans' invisibility is not quite perfect. Blue color is not affected by their electronic fields. I

got an idea that a pair of blue glasses would permit me to see them. So I took Ephony's, poured common ink on them and waited until our captive made himself disappear. Then I tried my little experiment—and it worked. There he was—plain as day!"

Juanita's eyes traveled over us as if we were a bunch of kids—which we were. As still and attentive as a flock of mice. A few, including Ephony, were shivering. I know the engineer was. For myself—I'm not saying.

"I also learned that the one thing most feared by the Selans is the radiation of an x-ray tube. Maybe"—and Juanita's voice turned to ice—"some of you scientists will recall that radium slowly disintegrates into lead. It's a long, natural process. However, for some reason, x-rays accelerate the radium decomposition a million-fold in the Selans' bodies. I concluded that a common x-ray tube would make an ideal weapon against them. And it was! It turned them into lead! I didn't have to worry

about their paralysis-ray. I found that a band of silver would absorb those rays—so I wore one when I entered the caverns!"

Ephony's big eyes popped out again. His voice was a bit weak but nonetheless distinct: "But how did you know we were captives in the Selans' caverns?"

"That's what I want to talk to *you* about!" Juanita bellowed again—and my ears cried out for vengeance. "Our captive caught the telepathic call, since it was too faint for a human mind to pick up. So I found out that you were on another Yuvac foray..."

Juanita advanced threateningly, arms outstretched. Believe me, those arms are capable of pulverizing a cement statue. The engineer is a very wise man, too. He darted out of the way—a gesture of self-defense.

"Ephonyyyy!" Juanita bawled a second time. "Get over here! I'll teach you to go out guzzling Yuvac....!"

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He threw the switch that seemed appropriate. His reward was a shock that nearly knocked him over.

SIR MALLORY'S

by S. D.
GOTTESMAN

MAGNITUDE

There must never be another war—that was the purpose of the conference. The world was united at last to make an equitable peace through open covenants. But who, or what, was behind the mysterious disappearance of leading delegates—and what menace overhung the famous Sir Mallory Gaffney?

CHAPTER I

AFTER ARMAGEDDON

THERE was a lusty scream from the visitors' gallery. The lights of the hall flickered for a moment; guards drew and fired at shadows on the wall or at each other. Panic threatened; the restless roar of a great crowd rose to a jabbering sound like monkey-talk. In the great gallery and on the vast floor a few dimwits began to dash for exits.

"Rot them," growled Senator Beekman. He shoved the mike at Ballister. "Shut them up," he snapped. "Use your precious psychology!"

Young Ballister took the mike, snapped on the button, dialed for heaviest amplification. "Atten-shun!" he barked into it, with the genuine parade-ground note of command.

The monkey-talk stopped for a priceless moment. Ballister jumped into it with both feet. Soothingly he said: "Now, folks, what's your hurry? Stick around—these learned gentlemen put on a pretty good show for your benefit."

The learned gentlemen who were dashing for exits purpled; the visitors in the gallery laughed loud and long at the feeble little joke. They resumed their seats.

"Take it, Senator," snapped Ballister in an undertone. "I'll scamper for a gander at the fuss up there." He hopped nimbly from the platform into an elevator which shot him up to the gallery. Displaying his Representative's badge he broke through the cordon of International Police that was zealously guarding an ordinary seat, like any other of the five thousand in sight.

"What was it?" he demanded of a French provost. "Killing?"

The provost shrugged. "We do not know vat, m'sieu. On-lee we know that in that seat sat M'sieu the mayor of Bruxelles."

"Hi," snapped a crisp young voice at Ballister.

He removed his horn-rims to regard the young lady disapprovingly. "Beat it, Kay," he ordered. "This isn't for the papers. Another unpleasant international incident. The Mayor of Brussels."

The young man looked down at the stage, very small and far away. From

An Unusual Novelet by One of Science Fiction's Popular New Authors

the speakers in the walls came the voice of Senator Beekman, hoarse and embarrassed:

"Our agenda will be incomplete today, gentlemen and ladies. I have been advised of the—the non-attendance of Monsieur Durtal, Mayor of Brussels and major sponsor of the bill entitled: "An Act to Prevent Competitive Development of Instruments of Warfare." We will proceed to—"

THE Anti-War Conference had been in full swing for two months. There was nothing slow or inefficient about the great congress of all the nations; the tremendous task before them took time, lots of it. The Grand Agenda of the Conference covered a space of three years, and all busy ones.

Ballister knew something about the Second World War; he had spent a couple of years in command of an infantry company at the tail-end of the mighty conflict. Then, when it was settled, and the sick-and-tired Axis armies and peoples had revolted and overthrown their war-lords, he had naturally gone to the Conference as an American delegate. Training as specialized as his—psychological jurisprudence—was in demand.

He thought he had seen everything, world-weary at twenty-three, but the Conference offered a few new kicks. There was something ludicrous about a Japanese delegate trying to wangle a few more square miles of Korea for his nation. Ballister was usually the trouble-shooter who explained to the simple people how their demands would encroach on so-and-so's rights, which would lead to such-and-such a consequence, which would be bad for the world in general for this-and-that reasons.

It was a plan magnificent in scope.

The vast Auditorium of Oslo was jammed with the delegates and specialists; the gallery was jammed day and night with visitors—anybody who wanted to see. There was to be no diplomacy under the table in the world the Conference was making! Twenty years of war had shown the fallacy of secret treaties; the delegates desperately hoped that their three years of cooperative common-sense would blast the old diplomatic nonsense from the face of the Earth.

Ballister had his troubles, not the least of these being Kay Marsh, of the New York Enquirer. Any other reporter he could handle; not Kay, for she had majored with him at Columbia in the same psych courses and knew him like a book. She knew then, in the gallery, that this wasn't the time for comedy.

"Did you know him?" she asked.

"Met him twice," said Ballister despondently, regarding the empty chair. "A real humanitarian, man of the people. Not one of these professionals. And he's the third to go."

"Pelterie from Switzerland, Vandervoort from South Africa, now Durtal of Belgium," she listed somberly. "Who's doing it?"

"If I knew I'd tell you," said Ballister. "Hell! Let us be gay! Have you got the handouts for the day's work?"

"I filed my copy already," she said. "Macklin's covering this business. He's going to do a series of articles on it. You're off?"

"Through for the week. Let's flit."

"Sounds like an insect," she complained. "But if you wish."

They elbowed their way through the crowd, out of the Auditorium. Oslo was en fete, with its face

washed and its hair brushed for the distinguished visitors. Its population had swelled by a half-million since it was chosen as the Conference site. Festively decked helicopters and gyros dragged advertising signs through the sky in all languages. One battered little blimp towed the notice in French: "Attend the Produce Show! April 11!"

Kay pointed at it with a smile. "Did I ever tell you I was a farmer's daughter?" she remarked.

Ballister recognized the lead. "All right," he said. "I'll take you. But I guarantee you'll be bored silly; they probably won't even speak the international language."

"Cows and hay don't have to speak any language," she sparkled happily. "I haven't seen a decent steer since Nebraska."

They got wind of the Produce Show and followed the smell to a neat collection of tents where Kay delightedly inspected timothy and cheeses and champion milkers for two hours while Ballister tried to hold his breath for that length of time.

"Hold it," he snapped as she was going into a gush at a draft-horse who stared sullenly at her hat. "Gent's fainted."

THEY elbowed their way through the crowd to find that the gentleman was nearly foaming at the mouth, twitching convulsively on the ground. The only serious attention being paid him was by a barker from a nearby tent who loudly offered three to one that the gentleman would die in less than half an hour.

"Throat constricted or something," said Kay after a swift examination. "Looks like a super-violent allergy."

Ballister went through his pockets, found a box of amyl nitrite pearls.

He broke one under the man's nose, drawing it away as he came to.

"You, there," he snapped, waving up a couple of husky farmers. "Carry him away from this damned show of yours. There's something in the air that nearly killed him."

The peasants, grinning happily, lugged the man to the nearest taxi stand. Ballister ordered the hackie to drive to the center of town, where monoxide would most likely replace the pollen or whatever it was that had strangled him.

The man was unable to talk for a few miles, though he insisted, despite the soothing words of Miss Marsh, on pantomiming gratitude. He was a fine-looking gentleman, ruddy-faced, middle-aged or over, exquisitely dressed.

Finally, with one tremendous cough, he cleared his throat. "Thanks awf'ly," he exclaimed. "Those dim-head hunks would've let me perish on the spot!"

"What got you going?" asked Ballister. "Pollen from the hay?"

"Nothing so dashed ordin'ry. Would you believe it? It was mice that nearly did me in. They could get me in about 60 seconds."

"Why not?" replied Ballister. He thought to introduce himself, adding his official capacity at the Conference.

"Splendid," muttered the gentleman. "Psychological jurisprudence and all that, I mean! I'm Gaffney, by the way. Sir Mallory. Baronet."

Kay sat up like a shot; in the next two minutes she had asked him thirty questions and was primed for fifty more. Sir Mallory Gaffney was news—big news—hot news! He was said to be the man who had invented the springing system that made the revolutionary Enfield Armored Wagon a practical and terrible weapon. He was

the man behind the gas-cooled tank motor. Likewise the synthesis of rubber from chalk and carbon dioxide and any number of other departures. And he had never been interviewed before!

Ballister pointedly interrupted the questioning with: "Didn't know you were at the Conference, Sir Mallory. Any official capacity, or just visiting?"

"Just ordered over, Mr. Ballister. They want my more-or-less expert testimony on this Durtal Bill."

"Durtal died or vanished without a trace this morning," said Kay. "Have you done anything in the invisibility line, Sir Mallory?"

The baronet laughed indulgently. "Hardly. You Americans had invisible battleships back in 1941, I hear. Learned the trick from some illusionist chap—Dunnings, or Kuss—one of them. But the mirrors lost their silvering in the sea-spray. That's as far as military invisibility's gone, I believe."

Ballister coughed warningly at the girl. "We'd better be getting back to the hotel," he said in overloud tones. "Sir Mallory's had a nasty shock." He filled in the rest of the trip with diplomatic small talk, avoiding the controversial subjects dear to the reportorial heart of Kay.

CHAPTER II

CONSPIRACY

AT THE Hotel De Universe et d'Oslo they were all in for a nasty shock. The manager dashed to them as they emerged from the cab and collared Sir Mallory and Ballister.

"Thank God for both of you!" he cried hysterically. "That this should

happen chez moi—it is incroyable, the horrible truly that we face—I ruin and you despair!"

"Yeah," said Ballister skeptically. It was a little thick, believing that the hard-headed manager of a great international hotel could be shaken by anything that could happen in the way of bad luck. "Yeah. Explain yourself."

"The senator American—Beekman, he is vanished from his room."

A committee head hailed them from across the lobby and came over, looking grave. "He isn't kidding, Ballister. Beekman's flitted completely, like Durtal and the others. Right in the middle of a caucus on the Competition Act. Went out to—er, went out for a moment and never came back."

"My seempathie, monsignors," said a burly, black-haired man. "I have heard of the so-gre-ait loss of thee Amairicain delegation."

"Thanks, Rasonho," said the committee head abstractedly. "Maybe he'll turn up."

"Lait us hope so. Thee passage of thee Competition Act means vair-ree much to my people." As he walked off Ballister studied the man. There was something familiar about him, something damned strange to boot. He inquired of the committee man.

"Rasonho? He's from the Pyreneese Peoples' Republic. Their only delegate. Good sort, but somewhat thick. He doesn't understand the parliamentary method."

"And what may the Pyreneese Peoples' Republic be?"

"I did an article on them," said Kay. "No wonder you missed them, because they popped up while you were at the front. They're a sort of Basque federation—not more than ten thousand of them, I'm sure. Yet they held DeCuerva's army when he

was coming North through the Pyrenees to relieve Milhaud. By heaven, they held him for three months! It's gone unsung for the most part, but I call it the most remarkable feat of the war."

"No doubt," said Ballister abstractedly. "And then, after the Initial Treaty they organized under a simple native President, thinking they had won independence from France and Spain both?"

"That's right. The Conference recognizes them—even invited the delegate."

A bomb exploded in the lobby of the hotel; the high ceiling swayed right and left. Screams echoed through the great hall; emergency exits opened onto the street automatically.

"This is intolerable!" fumed Sir Mallory when they had gained cover. "Someone—some party—is trying to destroy the Conference. They're trying to kill every damned one of us—or have us disappear bit by bit!"

"Sure," said Ballister. He wound a handkerchief around his wrist; flying plaster had clipped a bit of his flesh away. "What do you suggest, sir?"

"Armed guards, Mr. Ballister! We must fight this menace as it is trying to fight us! We must post men in every corridor—shoot suspicious persons on sight!"

"By heaven, yes!" snapped Kay. "They're trying to wreck the Anti-War Conference, and I won't have it. This is mankind's chance for peace at last, a final peace that will endure a hundred thousand years. Any dog who'd try to stand in the way of that, try to plunge the world back into the nightmare of war after war, deserves no mercy!"

Ballister looked somewhat sick; the corners of his mouth drooped

peculiarly, as though he tasted something unpleasant. Finally he looked square into the eyes of the girl and said without conviction: "Yes. Fight them tooth and nail. The best thing to do."

THE next day at the Conference Auditorium a half-dozen delegates proposed a Defense Act, claiming general privilege to take precedence over other business. After a few hearty seconding speeches which pointed out the danger in which they all stood there were read the concrete proposals.

The Conference disbanded the International Police which had been their protective force as ineffectual. There was organized on the spot an armed force to patrol all Oslo and vicinity, whose right of search was unquestionable, who were able to arrest on suspicion and defer trial indefinitely. The entire Act was passed, a few members abstaining, none voting the negative.

Ballister reported sick to Senator Beekman's successor. He said that the strain of the work had broken him down, that he needed a few month's rest. And indeed he was a pitiable sight—haggard, unkempt, eyes dilated, rambling again and again from his subject. The committee head insisted that he take a vacation.

Once outside the Auditorium the change in Ballister was nearly magical. He slicked back his hair, straightened like a ramrod and generally became his old dynamic self.

At the flying field he took up his 'gyro. He took it 'way up, twenty thousand feet and more. Then he headed South-east across the continent. Somewhere over Germany he realized that he was being followed.

There were no less than three 'gyros on his tail, none of them official.

Like his own craft they were converted warplanes, which, after the fighting had ceased, sold for a dime a dozen. Unlike his own, they carried no markings or national insignia.

Damning his thoughtlessness he set the controls for a straight course and went back to the tail compartment for arms. He found Kay curled up on a crate, blinking in the sudden light.

"Sweet," he snapped, "I'll bawl you out for this later. Right now there are two mean-looking rigs on our tail. Can you steer an eccentric course while I handle whatever guns there may be?"

"If there's two," she said, "we'd better both handle guns. You set her for flat loops at ceiling speed. I have a scattergun that throws its weight."

"Right," said Ballister. He stepped up the speed of the ship to its very top and then jiggled twenty miles-per-hour more out of the exhaust turbines. He set the controls for a circle, tight and fast. As the setting took and the ship swung he braced himself hard against the wall.

The centrifugal force was enormous; all loose fixtures smacked against the outside wall; he couldn't lift them off without a crowbar. Kay was battling the inertia, dragging herself along the outside wall into the storage compartment again. After a bit of heavy-handed rummaging she let out a scream of delight.

"Oh boy!" she gloated. "Look!" Painfully she hauled out and displayed a wire net, the kind used for quick repairs of the nacelle. "Get it?"

"I get it," said Ballister, a slow grin spreading over his face. "Let's hope they don't get us first." The

two ships had hauled up nearly alongside and were angling off to the attack. They fired a few tentative bursts at Ballister's 'gyro, presumably to judge the quality of his reply.

BALLISTER didn't reply. It would have been practically impossible to handle a gun against the drag of the whirling ship. But he did unsnap the top hatch, ducking back as the hinges tore loose and the square of metal flew up and out.

"Take it," said Kay. "I can't handle this thing alone." He eased his way along the wall, skirting the open hatch. Getting two big handfuls of the repair-net, he dragged it behind him, snagging a corner on a rivet. Kay spread the net on her side while Ballister made ready on his own.

"When I say the word," the girl ordered, "cast off." She squinted against the sun, hunting for the two planes. With a whoop and a holler they came out of the dazzle firing at the mid-riff of the 'gyro.

"Right," she said calmly, unsnagging the net and chucking it through the hatch simultaneously with Ballister's machine-like gestures. It spread beautifully in flight, came at the lead plane two square yards of metal moving at high speed.

The plane tried to shoot it out of the sky first, then tried to dodge. The metal netting slammed dead into the prop, splintering and wrecking as it passed on, balled up, into the stabilizer-vane.

The second plane pulled up sharply, fired a parting burst at the 'gyro and cold-bloodedly bombed the crippled and falling companion. There was nothing left but a few drifting fragments by the time Ballister had pulled out of the flat circles.

"Now why did he do that?" wondered Kay.

"It wasn't a mercy-shot by any means," said Ballister. "They have their secrets whoever they are. Put that in your notebook: they don't let themselves be taken alive."

"Sinister people," said Kay with a small shudder. "They tend to distress me."

CHAPTER III

PROGRESS

THEY were ready to fire on the ship that overtook them above the south of France, but Kay held back Ballister's hand.

"I'm blown," she declared, "if I've ever seen a ship as big and fancy as that one with a single-passenger rating on its side. Probably some rich coot who wants to talk to us."

It was a magnificent ship—big, enormously roomy, considering that its regulation number registered it as a single-seater. It had one of the biggest and latest engines, capable of five hundred and upwards, was amphibian, had auxiliary parachute packs and all the trimmings of a luxury liner.

Ballister tuned in on his wave. "Stop crowding me," he snapped. "There's lots of air for you."

A familiar voice came back: "Sorry, old man. I didn't want to contact you until I was sure it was you. This is Gaffney speaking, by the by." There was a good-humored chuckle.

"Oh—Sir Mallory!" exclaimed Ballister, aghast. "Sorry I barked at you. How come you're following me—if you are?"

"I am, right enough. Don't worry—I feel like a vacation, same as you. And—" a sinister note of strain crept into the baronet's voice—"I know when my life's in danger. There've

been no less than three attacks on me before I decided to light out. Used this old crate—gift from the grateful Royal Academy and all that—to follow you; you left a decently marked trail over Europe. One—ah—one presumes you're heading for the Pyrenese Peoples' Republic?"

"Exactly. I won't hobble your ship, Sir Mallory. You go on ahead and I'll taxi in. It ought to be a few minutes ahead. Have they got a landing field?"

"The best. I was talking with that delegate chap of theirs—Rasonho—tells me that once the traditionally anarchistic Basques got together they've worked miracles in a dozen years. Mountains rich in ores—loan from Germany—got smelters and all."

BALLISTER looked down and saw the landing field he had been promised. It was a honey; hard-surfaced, triple-tracked, on a small scale perhaps the best in Europe.

"Set it down, Sir Mallory. I'll follow." The big plane landed with mechanical ease; Ballister cross-winded and touched Mother Earth again. He emerged with Kay to shake hands with the nobleman.

"Charmed to see you here!" exclaimed Sir Mallory. "But—?" He left the question unanswered.

Sternly Ballister explained: "This young lady, with the romantic misconceptions common to the gentlemen and ladies of the press assumed that I was going off on a secret mission for the Conference. Naturally she could think of no simpler way to spy on me than to stow away in the tail of my 'gyro."

"And a lucky thing for him that I did," snapped Kay. She explained the dodge, the attack, and the happy

ending. The baronet was fascinated and enraged.

"Who could it be?" he exploded. "Russia? Germany? Britain?"

"Dunno," said Ballister. "Whoever it is has lots on the ball—and a couple of blind spots."

Mechanics, burly, tall fellows, drove out to their planes in a sort of motorbike. "Speak English?" asked one, after sizing them up.

"Rather well," answered the nobleman with a grin. "We're by way of being unofficial delegates of goodwill from the Anti-War Conference at Oslo. Whom do you suggest we see?"

"Mayor—Pedro Marquesch. We attend to planes—drive you into city. We are honored."

They stowed the planes into solidly built hangars, then loaded the visitors into the back of a big, new-style car. "Autos," the mechanic explained, "were import from Germany. We use not many—twenty among us, perhaps."

The car sped along a neat, narrow highway chiseled from the living rock of the Pyrenees. Their mechanic, with a sort of stolid pride in his people, pointed out the waterworks, the gasworks and a couple of outlying factories. With a smile at Sir Mallory he explained: "All smells to leeward of city. Not like London."

"After the Conference, my friend," said the noble, in a good humor, "we'll strive to overstrip your very high degree of civilization."

The car was pulled up to a halt. The driver pointed proudly; "Hydro-electric dam. Big power output. No smell. Two years old."

Ballister stared at the work. It wasn't as big as Dnieperstroy had been, but in its own way it was a work of genius, plain to see. Every block of concrete seemed to have a

peculiar rightness about it; the solitary blockhouse that surmounted the turbine house seemed somehow to be perfectly situated.

"Masterly," said Ballister. Kay nodded soberly. The man smiled a little as he drove on.

SUDDENLY they were in the city. It wasn't centralized and there were no skyscrapers; one skyscraper, indeed, could have held the entire population of the Pyreneese Peoples' Republic. But there were clearly defined sections. The residential city was a series of houses of ample size, in the Basque tradition of sturdy construction, each with its acres of lawn automatically sprinkled and presumably cut. The factory district was tree-shaded and sprawling; though there were no more than a dozen buildings.

The driver pointed out the business, administrative and scientific area, the tallest buildings in the city. They were symbolically white and severe, tall and thin like ascetic monks.

They were dropped at a hotel-like affair of three stories.

"Completely automatic," said their driver. "No pay—guests of the state. We have a few of them. This was for German and French tradesmen."

Wondering, they went in. There were clean, spare accommodations; signs in French advised them that they could eat at such-and-such a place at certain hours.

Sir Mallory excused himself, with a regretful, though humorous confession that he was aging out of all proportion.

"Well?" asked the girl, inspecting their communal sitting-room.

"Uncanny," said Ballister. "Damned if I know whether I should be delighted or annoyed. I'm both.

There's something so awfully queer going on that I shudder to think of it. Little over a dozen years ago these Basques were an anarchistic lot, living family lives.

"Lord! In those twelve years they've completely transferred their allegiance from the family to the state, obviously gone in for heavy cooperation—remember that dam—built a model city, and, it seems, done away with crime. It's impossible. It's against all reason."

"You must be terribly afraid of progress," said Kay thoughtfully.

"**N**O," said Ballister. "Not development. Not normal evolution. That's growth. But this lunatic speed is more like a cancer than normal social achievement. I think—I'm sure!—there's something behind this slew of nonconformities."

"And," exploded Kay, her temper snapping like a rubber band, "I'm dead certain that this is a milestone in the history of man—and that this Pyrenean Peoples' Republic is destined to be one of the great powers of the world!" She slammed into her room.

"Good night!" yelled Ballister after her.

He slept that night to dream of cancerous proliferations spreading their sickly-white fingers over the map of Europe, then snaking across the ocean and plunging a dagger into the heart of Western Hemisphere.

Kay couldn't stay mad, no more than could Ballister. They apologized sweetly to each other at breakfast under the paternal eyes of Sir Mallory, then set out for the Mayor's office. People on the streets, big men and solid, tall women stopped to stare at them for a moment before hurrying on to the day's work. The mayor was the Basque type, but

bald as an egg. His grin was slow and agreeable; he had a firm hand-shake.

"You like our small country?" he asked.

"We admire it enormously," hedged Ballister. "I was commenting last night on your excessively rapid growth." He shot a malicious glance at Kay.

"Indeed? We explain that, you know, with the theory that the Basque spirit has been in its infancy for many centuries and is now at last growing up. That you may tell the outside world—but not too much of it. We should not wish to become an attraction for tourists. It is our opinion that there is work to be done, that we Basques are well-suited to do it. You would be amazed at the spirit of collaboration that exists among us."

"I already am," said Ballister. "Your city is the finest example of communal activity I have ever seen." There was something flat and deadly in his tone which even he could not explain.

THEY had been spending a marvelously restful five days in the Republic, not bothering to think. Alone for a couple of moments Kay abstractedly confessed: "Isn't it remarkable that even the great Sir Mallory Gaffney, Baronet, can be a hell of a bore after some period of unmitigated companionship?"

"His conversation sparkles," said Ballister noncommittally. "It scintillates like the morning sun on dew-drops. He's a generous and a kindly old gentleman. He's wise and good and noble—but I tend to agree with you; I'm sick of the sight of him. Sir Mallory tends to inhibit intellection. I haven't been able to buckle down

to a problem in the last few days without his kindly interrupting and helping out with horribly confusing results."

"You've noticed that?" she asked, with wide-open eyes. "Is he just trying to help us relax?"

"Dunno. He has a technique—I'm working with something in social growth, say. He interrupts. I expound. He ponders, then throws in so damned many elements that I don't know what to make of it. He may be right! He's near the genius level, I know. But I believe in tackling one problem at a time. He, obviously, doesn't."

"Or," suggested the girl, "pretends he doesn't."

They dummied up as Sir Mallory reentered. He sensed the tension and then went through a curious process of winking, snickering slightly and balancing on one foot.

Kay and Ballister exchanged glances. Sir Mallory grinned happily. "Aha!" he said.

Ballister caught on. "Well, dear," he said, "shall we go for a ride?" The glance he gave the girl was saccharine refined with an eye for sweetness. It was so paralyzingly mushy that Kay reeled beneath the wealth of sloppy sentiment. She studied for one wild moment the silly smile on his face—then caught on.

"Anything you say, sweetness," she cooed.

They twined arms then, and after another sloppy pair of looks ambled out. Sir Mallory called after them with huge delight:

"Be good, children!" His chuckle followed them down the rustic lane they chose.

Out of sight and earshot they untwined and sat heavily on a bench.

"Explain all that," she said. "What was in the air?"

"Lo-o-ove," said Ballister, polishing his horn-rims. "Not the kind that means anything, the kind that mates people for life and after. But the kind of puppy-love that you can hardly call an emotion, it's so animal and unreasoning. I refer to the sort of stuff that every middle-aged man has a soft spot in his head for. Further, he reasoned correctly—on incorrect premises—that we'd be incapable of comparing notes on him and this hellish place if we were otherwise occupied. His error."

"Hellish?" asked Kay. "That's strong."

"Agreed. Do you recall the exact population of this place?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Never mind just yet. It's 7,776. Half male and half female. Note that it's a perfect number, divisible by the whole slew of integers, a perfect radical, it evolves into an integral root—"

"Sure!" she exploded. "I see! So they're—they're—" Kay paused, baffled.

"I know how you feel," Ballister smiled sympathetically. "There's something stuck away in the back of one's head that's just a little distance beyond explanation, just a little too deeply buried for unearthing. What is it? Damned if I can tell you, but it's very important." He laughed sardonically.

"The baronet comes," said Kay. Ballister embraced her violently; she nearly bit a hunk out of his ear.

"Excuse me," said the noble kindly. "The mayor—Marquesch—suggested that we inspect the landing field. He wants to know if we can offer any suggestions for improving traffic-flow. Thinks that there's going to be lots of commerce on that hunk of soil."

"May well be," said Kay, dropping

her eyes with maidenly modesty. "These wonderful people of the Republic! How do they do it?"

"Cooperation," said Ballister, straightening his tie. "They work as one man. That's the secret." He went into a brown study, trailing behind the two others as they walked along the rustic path to the waiting auto. "Cooperation as one man," he muttered to himself more than once.

CHAPTER IV

FLIGHT

KAY sat up in bed, snapped on the light. "Who's there?" she demanded.

"Me," whispered Ballister. "Let me in!"

"What?" In spite of herself she smiled. "What on Earth made you think that I—"

"Pipe down! This isn't lust; it's terror. We've got to get moving fast! They're onto us somehow."

The girl slipped into some clothes, threw on a coat. The moment she was through the door Ballister grabbed her arm and hurried her out of the hostel along the street.

"What time is it?" she asked, squinting at the full moon.

"Three Ayem—wish I could say all's well."

There was a shot in the night; the long streak of flame that a rifle-barrel throws split the darkness of the street. Ballister reeled a little and cursed.

"Where to?" asked the girl, supporting him. He was hit in the shoulder.

"Garage. Hurry it up." They slunk into the darkness of a double lane of trees, slipping along like a pair of shadows. The girl was still wearing bedroom slippers; Ballister

was in his stocking feet. There was no noise whatsoever and scarcely a light in all the residential area.

Again the streak of flame, again the sudden crack of the rifle. "Nowhere near," said Ballister, his voice barely audible. "Faster."

Running in the dark, making no noise at all, speeding through relatively unfamiliar ground, they made good time. The garage loomed before them, one of the squat, white, solid buildings of the city.

Ballister, flinging off her helping arm, tore open the wide wing doors and darted in. She slipped behind, like a ghost.

"Light!" he said. She fumbled for the switch, snapped it on.

Kay watched as Ballister hunted for a crowbar among the little group of municipal automobiles, found one and proceeded to bash the mechanical guts out of all the cars save one. Kay started the motor of that one.

HE had hurled the bar through the last motor and collapsed beside her in the driver's seat when the custodians appeared, and in arms. One of the tall, solid Basque types raised a long rifle, took steady aim—

Kay hurled three tons of metal square at him and through the door. The pick-up of the auto was superb; its mechanical springs took up the shock of the body as though they had never hit it.

Through the streets of the city they rocketed, lightless while Ballister fumbled for the switch. The construction was somewhat unfamiliar; he collapsed totally before finding it. Kay snapped the running lights on, not daring to glance at the man by her side.

She turned onto the airport road. Behind her there was the roar of a second motor. In the rear-vision mir-

ror she saw two pale purple circles that were the running-lights of a pursuing car.

A brief chatter of metallic slugs on the car's tail told her of a semi-automatic rifle at the least. If it were a machine-gun she knew they'd never get out of this chase scene alive. The rattle sounded again. There was no whang of bullets penetrating metal. Kay breathed again, in relief.

Europeans in special cars used to hold the speed-records for ground-travel on a straight track. That was probably because no American girl had ever bothered to enter the lists against them. Kay had teethed on a piston-ring and broken the speed-laws by the age of twelve. Since then her progress had been rapid; she knew cars backwards and forwards and overturned. She knew every trick of the throttle and gas, knew how to squeeze another mile-per-minute out of the most ancient wreck on the roads.

The municipal car was of unfamiliar make; it took her about five minutes to size up its possibilities; when she had she sped quite out of sight of the pursuing car.

"Wake up," she yelled at the man by her side. "If you aren't dead, for heaven's sake, wake up!"

There was a vague gesture from the figure, and a dim smile on its face. "Knew you'd do it," Ballister murmured. "Keep going, Kay. Get Sir Mallory's plane out, Kay. Back to Oslo we go—" The murmured words were stilled.

Wondering if her friend were dead, she stepped more speed out of the car, hauled up before the deserted airfield. The hangar-doors were merely latched against the weather; she swung them open and switched on the lights.

The ornate, fast plane of the noble was balanced feather-like on its dozen retractable landing wheels; she trundled it out of the shed and managed to load Ballister into it.

From the road came the roar of a motor; far in the night was the gleam of headlights. Kay-fiddled with the controls, backed the plane into the wind. The car shot onto the landing field, tried to cross before the plane and force her around. She lifted a little, swung around the auto, ducked at the rattle of a gun. The control-panel splintered into fragments of plastic and metal; alcohol ran over her knees.

Mercifully the plane rose as she yanked wildly at the stick with no response. It headed diagonally up, its course quite straight. The stick and the pedals were quite dead. And there were no dual controls.

Into the night they flew, at the mercy of the wind, far above the landing field, in the heart of the jagged Pyrenees.

Their luck, such as it was, didn't last; one of the peaks loomed before them. Kay had just time enough to cover the body of Ballister, wondering if he were still alive, if he would survive this, if she would, when the plane struck.

CHAPTER V

REVELATION

SOMEONE was singing, she noticed, with an altogether inappropriate glee, an objectionable song about his Majesty, the King of Spain.

"Stow it, Hoe," ordered the voice of Ballister. "Let the lady rest."

She sat up violently. "You!" she said. "What happened—" She felt

a curious weakness in the middle and sat back again. "What's up?"

Ballister approached, relief glowing all over his face. "You had us worried. You've been on a liquid diet for a week without once coming up for air. How'd you like to tear into a steak?"

"Love it," she snapped, realizing that the sense of weakness had been hunger. "Any potatoes?"

"You'll have rice instead. May I present Jose Bazasch." He led forward by one hand a shy little old man who wore the Basque beret.

"An honor," he muttered incoherently. "Fine ladies—noble gentlemen in my cave—"

"Tell your story, Hoe," suggested Ballister grimly. He speared a broiled steak from its string where it turned over the fire. A slab of washed bark served very well for a platter.

"The story? This. I am Jose Bazasch, a Basque. A dozen years ago, during the wars there were many Basques. I was sheep-thief—outlaw. Lived here in the cave. I am no more thief because there are no more sheep. There are no more Basques except me."

"If you'll excuse the omission," said Kay, chomping busily, "I'm eating too energetically to register surprise. Kindly explain in words of one syllable or less."

"Okay, child. Your brains would be addled after your long illness. I'll begin at the beginning. There was a slew of Iberians along about the beginnings of the Christian era who were decimated by, in rapid succession, the Romans, the Carthaginians, the Goths, Visigoths, Vandals, Huns, Saracens and their most holy majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella.

"That brings us down to 1939, the beginning of the war. The few

Basques left fight with the French, the Spanish and any other army they fancy. Most of them die. A few thousand are left in the lower mountain villages. One day in 1951 the villages are bombed by German planes—blown right off the map. Squads of soldiers hunt down the rest of the Basques in the hills and pop them off."

"But not Jose!" interjected the old man with considerable excitement and a little pride.

"That's right. Not Jose. Hoe was so well hidden that half the time he couldn't find his own den for a month once he had left it. Anyway—there aren't any Basque villages nor any Basques. Yet the next year the Pyrenean Peoples' Republic is announced and in the next they held DeCuerva's army, which never did get through. Now, a dozen years later we see this uncannily perfect city of the future, achieved by a handful of men and women—whom we've seen—and that's that."

"**T**HAT'S what?" asked the girl abstractedly.

"That's what I was planning to ask you as soon as you regained consciousness."

"You've waited in vain," said Kay, licking her fingers. "I can't think on a full stomach. Nobody can. By the way, you neglected to explain the events of the night of a week ago. How did you know they suspected us of suspecting them of being not what they seemed to be?"

"You know the Mayor's office building?"

"Like a book. I might almost say I know it backwards."

"Right, child. You do know it backwards, and what's more you don't know the half of it. Because more than the half of it is under-

ground. I bumbled on the Mayor that night going down into the basement of his building and asked if I could go too. Taking something of a chance I pushed by him before he could make an excuse.

"I guess he didn't have a gun, because I wasn't shot in the back for seeing what I saw. There were some machines there that make their hydroelectric turbines look like a pin-wheel. Big—very big—and mysterious in function, to me at least. Simply didn't look like anything at all—except maybe a glorified and electric concrete mixer. And a couple of people mucking around with oiling-cans.

"They drew and fired; I shoved the mayor in and rolled the hall-desk against the door, propped that with my walking-stick for leverage and beat it for your flat."

"Nice condensed narration," she said thoughtfully. "But what made you poke around in the first place? Dashed if I had any grounds for suspicion of conspiracy and such."

"You've forgotten a lot since we took those psych courses. How do you tell a louse from an honest man?"

"A louse doesn't trust anybody."

"Right. Not even when he's middle aged does he trust a couple of moonstruck lovers. Any nasty old man who'd break in on a tete-a-tete is bad from head to toe.

"And the clincher, to me at least, was this bloody, mysterious and cancerous growth of the so-called Basque people in less than two decades. There was something too awfully methodical about their city. It didn't show any of the right traits. No, not a single one. It was as though they'd deliberately set out to build themselves a city of the future intended to impress and amaze—one, also, geared to the maximum in efficiency."

Kay listened quietly. Finally she suggested, with a little shudder: "Gestapo?"

"Couldn't be anything else, sweet." Ballister fell silent in the contemplation of bucking the secret police that had held the German empire of conquest together by torture, fire and sword for years beyond its normal life-span. They were wise, villainous and tricky, the Gestapo.

It had been thought that the majority of them had been killed off by the Captive's Revolt years ago. Surely there couldn't be enough left to fill that city!

"IT'S a bridge-head," he said at last. "A stepping-stone for attack on an unprecedented scale and in an altogether new technique. You guess what that is?"

"Like the story about the rabbits, perhaps," Kay suggested diffidently. "There were two rabbits being chased by a pack of hounds. They were tired, completely winded. There was no chance of them outrunning the hounds, who were young and fresh. So one rabbit said to the other rabbit: 'Let's hide in that bush until we outnumber them.'"

"Maybe," said Ballister. "Too bad reconnaissance is out of the question. They must be patrolling the woods seven deep looking for us." He brooded for a while, then exploded: "And the young monster of a hydro-dam? What's that for?"

"Electric light," said Kay. She reconsidered after a moment: "No. Because they have a strict curfew, so they don't need street-lights. And that dam would deliver twenty times the power needed for street-lighting. Maybe a hundred times that. I'm no installations engineer, boy."

"It's very important, that dam. Otherwise they wouldn't risk build-

ing a big, suspicious thing like that. And they do want to hide it; they did their best along that line to keep us from noticing it."

"What?" squeaked the girl. "That chauffeur stopped the car and pointed it out, and we've been taken to inspect it half a dozen times! Keep us from noticing it, forsooth!"

Ballister sat quietly and grinned like a cat.

The girl considered, then blushed and admitted shamefacedly: "You're right. They even fooled me, the psychiatrist. They threw it into our faces so often that we were supposed to take it for granted and not think about the thing. The Purloined Letter, et seq."

"Good kid!" said Ballister with faked heartiness. "I wish to heaven that one of us was a real scientist—physics and nuclear chemistry. Because the one purpose of that dam is obviously to power the machinery I saw in the basement before the chase-scene. And I don't know what the machinery does. . . ."

"So it's all solved, huh?" Kay asked belligerently. "As simple as pi square? The Gestapo's been repudiated by the German people, so they choose this method as a bridgehead on the continent for future use when the Swastika shall ride again."

"That's what it looks like," said Ballister self-satisfiedly.

"Things are seldom what they seem. That's what it ain't. How could even a heavily-disciplined Gestapo unit do what they've done in the time they've had?"

Ballister was rocked back on his heels. "Blast it," he said bitterly. "The man-hour formulae make it a rank impossibility. It's so far outside the realms of possibility that I'd bet my boots on it." A thought

struck him: "But the city's there, Kay!"

"Ignore it, boy. There's trickery involved. We'll have to find out where."

He looked at her glumly. "Reconnaissance?"

"Yep. Both of us."

BAZASCH knew things about stalking that would pop the eyes of a Scottish stag-hunter. He had the knack of slipping along without enough covering to hide a rabbit, and in the little space of a week he tried to teach Kay and Ballister what he knew. In his own inarticulate way he got some of the principles over, though he despaired of ever making guerillistas of them.

Mournfully he explained that one had to be born to the fellowship of stalkers and then be taken in hand by a wise old man who could explain things. He, Jose, could not explain. So long he had not talked to anybody but himself that the language sometimes seemed to be going altogether.

And between the grueling hikes-under-cover in the mountains the two Americans were gathering together their data, inferring widely, working sometimes by association rather than logic, jumping through time and space in their reasoning rather than let go of a theory.

They evolved conclusive—to them—proof that Sir Mallory was the prime scoundrel behind the Pyrenean Peoples' Republic. Checking back on his mental notebook Ballister recalled what might be considered evidence to that effect:

"I had my eyes on him the moment he showed up in our little two-some. Whether he's the real Sir Mallory turned traitor doesn't matter much. He may have popped the real Sir Mallory and taken his place

with disguises. Anyway, you recall the outrageous bombing of the Hotel De Oslo Et d'Universe, or whatever it was. That was the feeblest bombing I ever encountered, and yet Sir Mallory and a few old hens got excited about it.

"He proposed a military police of unlimited powers. That was a very bad sign. It was the first step towards wrecking the Conference. It denied democracy itself, the principle the Conference was constructed on. There could have been no bombing or killing half so disruptively effective as that move."

Kay wearily agreed. Her knees were scratched and her hands were calloused with crawling. But she'd got over her illness and felt hard as nails. The rough-and-ready bullet extraction that Bazasch had performed on Ballister had healed nicely.

CHAPTER VI

SHOWDOWN

IN THE big night there was no moon. Jose had planned it that way, he claimed. They started at dusk, carrying their first two meals.

It was a horrible grind for an old man, a girl and a recently-shot person. They made crevasses that seemed impossible, climbed lofty trees to sight. After some hours of the terrible labor they sighted the lights of the landing field glowing dimly through the night. Fearing no cars they made good time along the highway, turning quietly into three roadside shadows when they passed the blockhouse that surmounted the dam. They found the city to be a bigger blot of black in the general darkness.

Slipping down the allies and lanes

of the city, silent as so many ghosts, the three made their way to the center of town. By prearranged plan Ballister unlatched the front door of the Mayor's little office building.

They entered behind him; Ballister felt for the cellar door. It swung open and a blaze of light poured through, shocking, dazzling after the hours-long trek through pitch-blackness.

"Aha!" whispered Bazasch. His cat's eyes contracted; from his belt flicked a knife, eight wicked inches of blank steel. It slipped through the air, lodged in the throat of a burly "Basque" who had made the mistake of drawing his gun.

"Close it," said Kay, dashing down the stairs to kick the gun away from the hand of the "Basque," wounded but not yet dead. She finished him for the moment with a kick to the side of his head.

Ballister and Bazasch tore after her, the door bolted as securely as it could be.

Kay inspected the tower of machinery, marvelling. "Don't ask me," she finally griped. "I agree with my ignorant colleague. Whatever it is, it drinks lots of juice and it looks like a concrete-mixer."

Ballister picked up the gun. It was a hefty hand-weapon, a wide-gage projector of lead slugs that mushroomed effectively. "What do we do now?" he asked weakly. "That individual sent in an alarm, to be sure, before he even drew."

"Take a good look," said Kay. She indicated the man on the concrete flooring. "Isn't the face familiar?"

"There's a swell resemblance to that old rascal, Sir Mallory Gaffney. You mean it?"

"Nothing but that. What's it signify?"

"You have me there. What is it, Hoe?"

"It is the beseigers—can be no others. They come!"

THERE was the clump of boots outside, up the stairs.

Ballister slipped Bazasch the gun: "Can you hold them, Hoe? Hold them by yourself? Because we're going to be busy down here. Will you?"

The Basque took the gun, sighted along its barrel for a moment before slowly replying: "They must have killed my whole family, which I disgraced by becoming sheep-thief. I will no longer disgrace."

"Good man," gasped Ballister, holding his wounded shoulder. "Go get 'em!"

The little man scrambled up the stairs, chose a shallow niche. A big grin spread over his face as he raised his gun-muzzle and fired once through the door. He commanded the position completely; while his ammunition lasted—he neatly caught the pouch Kay unhooked from the man and tossed up to him—he was impregnable.

With feverish speed Ballister stripped the man on the flooring. Kay went through the pockets; came up triumphantly with a slim pamphlet. "In German!" she explained.

"Let me." He took the little book and ruffled through it, then cast a despairing glance at the monstrous mechanism that nearly filled the room. "It's a handbook for this thing—the German for it is duplo-atomic-radexic-multiplie-convertoir. What do you suppose that means? The wiring's beyond me completely. I couldn't repair an electric bell."

She took the thing and unfolded the gatefold wiring-diagram, studied it with wrinkled brows. "Sweet Lord of Creation!" she muttered. "I have

to crack this on an empty stomach!" Whipping out a pencil she traced—tried to trace—the wires and tubes to their source. Finally she snapped: "There's a switchboard somewhere on the side of the thing. Find it, please."

Ballister hunted, finally climbing the rickety iron ladder that led to the summit of the machine. "Got it!" he said. "And it makes sense!"

"Turn on the power," she called at him.

He threw the switch that seemed appropriate. His reward was a shock that nearly threw him from the structure. But the power went through; tubes lit here and there.

Eagerly Kay hunted in the vitals of the mechanism, comparing it with the diagram. "See a hopper-opening?" she asked.

JOSE fired three times in rapid succession, brought four dead "Basques" tumbling down the stairs. He waved cheerily at Ballister.

"There's a switch for it," he said, throwing it down. A metal shutter opened; its cavernous maw led into blackness. Kay, shuddering a little, peered in. "Ought to light," she said desperately. "There should be a battery of tubes that the raw material—whatever it is—passed under. Fish for it, will you?"

Ballister stabbed at a switch; gears began to clank like a windmill's crushers. He tried another. "Okay!" yelled the girl. "They light!"

He scrambled down, squatted beside her. She had cast the book aside and was weeping. "Here," she sobbed, "all the power we need, a machine that does something terrible and wonderful to it, and we can't use it! We don't know how!"

Ballister, before replying, administered a mercy-kick to one of the "Basques" who was trying to reach

his gun, wounded as he was. Jose caught the weapon. He was grinning with fiendish delight as he fired another burst through the door.

Ballister and Kay rose. The girl's tears dried on her face as she studied the three new corpses.

"Spitting images," said Ballister, his throat hoarse. This was something uncanny, something that transcended warfare and science. Except for minor details of hair-line and clothes the four bodies were alike—all the image of Sir Mallory.

"I get it," said the girl briskly. "There was talk of it in a Sunday feature I did. It's the only simple, logical explanation for your city of the future built as if by one man. It was built by one man, and he was Sir Mallory."

"That's what the machine does," snapped Ballister. "Rearranges molecules to suit the pattern. Set the pattern for a man and feed in your raw material, and out come as many copies as you want. Perfect war-unit, perfect rapport between and among the slew of them. Perfect for spy-systems. And the Gestapo flair for disguises took care of enough variations to satisfy us. Hell, who'd look for a thing like that?"

The girl was scrambling up the stairs again. "Excuse me," she barked rudely at Bazasch. "Not at—" he was beginning to reply. He shut his mouth with a snap as she began to undress him without ceremony.

She pulled from his chest his home-made undershirt, fingered the soft, short-cropped fur. "Go right ahead," she said. "Thanks."

"Brilliant," admitted Ballister after a moment's thought. "Utterly brilliant. Very sure you can make it work?"

"For a simple thing like this, yes.

After all, dead flesh-tissue ought to be fairly simple. Now where is the pattern-maker or whatever they call it?"

"Maybe this?" asked the man, indicating a sort of scanning-disk, like an old-style television set's.

"Nothing else!" she declared triumphantly as she set the hunk of clothing in the area covered by the disc.

Ballister picked up the corpses one by one and chucked them into the hopper.

Another hinged door raised itself and soft scraps of fur began to pour from it in a stream that ended in a few minutes when the weight of the pile equalled about seven hundred pounds.

"Thank God for Hoe's dainty taste in undergarments," said the girl. "Nothing less than mouse-fur for his skin!"

"Open the door, Hoe!" called Ballister. The little man obeyed, dumb and surprised. There was an immediate influx of the duplicates of Sir Mallory, an influx that turned into a helpless pile of dying men, strangling in the last extremes of allergic reaction.

Grimly contemplating the last of the twitching Mallories, Ballister said: "We'll clear the city by spreading these mouse-skins neatly through the streets. We can rain them on the forest, in case anybody's escaped."

"We can detect spies with them," said the girl.

"Right. A load will be useful when we fly back to Oslo in the morning."

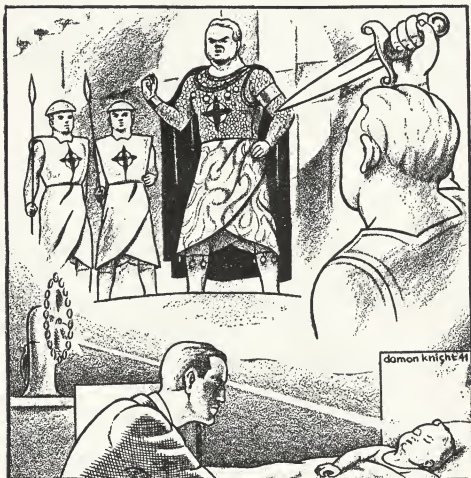
"It's morning now," she said, indicating the ray of dawn that streaked through the door and splashed down the stairs.

"It is. Morning," said Ballister, "Morning over the world."

BABY DREAMS

Burrell's baby was only ten months old—but it remembered what had happened ten thousand years ago!

by ALLEN WARLAND



“TELL ME, Doc, do babies dream?”

The expert on child psychology leaned back in his chair meditatively, surveying the man before him. An odd question with which to open a consultation, he thought. But there could be no doubt that the man had something on his mind. He was a well-built,

middle-aged person who quite evidently had become well to do through his own efforts. Probably self-educated. He was just the type of man, the doctor concluded mentally, to be interested in any little thing that struck his curiosity in the right manner.

“Well now,” commenced the expert, “that is difficult to say posi-

tively. Off-hand, my answer would be: yes, they do, sometimes. A great deal depends upon the age of the child and its mental condition.

"But why do you ask? Has your baby been dreaming?"

The doctor smiled amiably as he put the question, wondering just what quirk there might be in this case. The other man smiled in return, laughed shortly.

"I guess that was a funny way to start in, Doc. Maybe I should have begun with telling you why I came. You see, my wife and I had a sort of an argument about that, yesterday, and I decided to run down this morning and find out for sure. I don't object to paying a fee to find out something I don't know; I'm like that."

The expert nodded; his estimate of the man had been correct.

"And just what caused this discussion between you and your wife?"

"It's the things the baby seems to say when it's asleep, Doc. You see, we have a baby son, about ten months old, at home. It just wasn't natural for a kid that old to say things. It sounds all wrong to me."

The doctor tapped his desktop softly with a pencil. "Do you remember just when and how it started?"

"Well, about a month ago my wife and I were at home at night alone. The baby was asleep in the next room. I was reading, and Elsie was sewing, I think. We had the door open just so's she could tell if the baby should wake up. You know how mothers are. Well, everything was peaceful until all of a sudden there was a yell from the next room. It was the baby all right, but it didn't sound like him at first because the noise wasn't a crying, or a gurgling, or a bawling like you usually hear.

It sounded as if a man with a high voice was saying something in a foreign language. What he said sounded like 'Kalaxar!' and it was in a tone that sounded as if he were mad or something. Then the baby began to bawl in his natural tone.

"We rushed in immediately to see what had happened. I was thinking that maybe a burglar had broken in, but only the baby was there. He was sitting half up in the cradle, crying to beat the band. My wife picked him up and got him quiet soon enough.

"But you know what was so strange about it all was the voice. I swear the kid said 'Kalaxar' just as clear as I did. It was a kind of high-pitched voice just like a baby would have if it could speak."

The expert coughed softly. "Was that all that happened? I mean the first time, of course."

"Yes, that was all. We didn't think much of it at the time, and the baby slept okay the rest of the night. Nothing happened again until a few nights later.

"That time, though, we had the baby asleep in the room with us; Elsie insisted upon it. She had an idea that someone must have broken in the first night and said the strange word, although I didn't see how it could be possible.

"Well, as I said, the baby was asleep right in the room with us that night. It began to toss around a bit in the cradle and we went over to see what was annoying him. Then I noticed that his lips were moving just as if he were saying something to himself. That was strange, too, but we didn't have time to wonder about it because, just at that moment, he opened his mouth and yelled. It was the same queer word in that same strange voice. Imme-

diately afterwards, he opened his eyes, startled, sort of, and began to bawl."

"And the baby didn't say anything else the second time?" asked the expert.

"Only the one word, Doc. It's happened several times. The last was a couple of nights ago; that's what started the argument yesterday. My wife said the baby had dreams which did it; it was talking in its sleep. Now I admit that a grown person can do that, but it just doesn't seem possible for a baby. I always understood that dreams were only memories and thoughts of the past that go through your head when you're asleep. So, I said, how can a baby dream when it hasn't any past to dream about? A ten-month-old infant can't have memories the way a man would have; but I've got to admit that the child acted like it."

THE DOCTOR lit a cigarette. "Your belief about the cause of dreams is only correct in part. A great many dreams are caused by longings and desires on the part of the dreamer, rather than past memories. In that respect, it is quite possible for a baby to dream. Should the child become hungry, it might dream of being fed. Such dreaming might manifest itself by causing the baby to start crying in the middle of the night; this sort of thing happens with animals. So, if your baby had only cried in his sleep, I would put it down to hunger or thirst, or any other desire a baby might have.

"But this, I must confess, is different: It is something for which I have no answer: I can only tell you that similar things have happened before. There are cases on record where babies and little children have conversed in unknown and unidenti-

fiable languages. None of these have carried over into maturity, so we have no records of any of these tongues nor memories on the part of the speakers of what was said. So this is one of the things for which science has no answer, so far."

The doctor stood up and leaned over toward where his consultant sat, on the opposite side of the desk. He was getting excited.

"In view of my last remark, I'd like to ask something of you. You, Mr. Burrell, are an intelligent person, more so than average. Would you be willing to help me try to find out the cause of this occurrence in your son? Would you be willing, in the interest of human knowledge, to let me conduct a few experiments on your son in an effort to determine what it is he says and why he says it?

"There will be nothing harmful, I guarantee you that. The child will not be harmed physically in any way. I will not charge you anything for this visit. I want to co-operate with you as a friend to solve this enigma. Will you help me?"

The father sat back in his chair, a pondering expression on his face.

"I'm not sure Elsie would like it. But I think that if you outline just what you intend to do, I may be able to convince her to let you examine the baby and do what you can. I confess I would like to help you get to the bottom of this mystery."

"Good! I am sure you will agree and that your wife will, too. Here is what I propose to do. Do you believe in hypnotism and telepathy?"

The man raised his eyebrows. "Hypnotism is a sure thing. I've seen it several times on the stage and I was once hypnotized myself some years ago. I don't remember it, but they tell me I did some strange

things. But just what is telepathy?"

"Mind reading, to put it simply. The ability of one individual to read or know the thoughts of another."

The man frowned. "I always thought that was done by some kind of tricks or codes. Isn't it?"

The doctor smiled. "Stage mind reading is, undoubtedly. But there is a force which we call telepathy, and upon which more than just a little bit has been done by investigators. You've heard of Dr. Rhine and ESP? That is just one aspect of it. It's much like electricity a great many years ago when we first started to make it work. It's there all right, and we are beginning to find out a little about the way it works, but we still haven't made it work for us yet. And we still do not know exactly what it is.

"Have you ever had the experience of starting to think or talk about someone whom you haven't seen for some time, and the next instant run into that person?"

"Sure," replied Burrell. "But that's a coincidence. Everybody has that happen to them."

"Exactly. It happens much too often to be mere coincidence. Do you know what the chances against the coincidence are? One out of two billion. When a 'coincidence' happens every day, you just can't call it that any longer. You see, one rule of scientific method is to take the simplest method of explaining things, once you have some data to go on. And in the case of telepathy, 'coincidence' has stopped being a simple explanation; it's about as complex a one as you can find. Saying that mankind is telepathic is much simpler, and, men of science go by one theory for unexplained phenomena until a better one comes along.

"Well, according to the latest explanation of it, the reason you just thought about this person is because he was already near you, and coming in your direction. His mind emanations were impinging on yours and yours on his. Next time a 'coincidence' like that happens, ask the other fellow and see if he, too, hasn't just been thinking of you."

"Just what is your plan, then, Doc?"

"I have a very good friend who has this power—he doesn't commercialize it, so there won't be any expense. I will have him come, and the child be hypnotized and put to sleep. He will then proceed to attempt to receive the thoughts and impressions that are passing through the baby's mind. Thus we will be able to tell what it is your son is dreaming of and what it means. Is this all right with you?"

Burrell nodded as he stood up. "Yes. It sounds all right to me. When should I bring the baby and put on the act?"

"Don't bring the child here. The experiment can best be performed at home in the child's natural surroundings. Will tomorrow night be all right?"

"Quite all right. Doc. Then I'll be seeing you tomorrow night. Good morning."

ACCORDINGLY the next night about eight o'clock the doorbell rang at Burrell's home. The door was opened by the father himself, who proceeded to usher them into the drawing room, into the presence of his wife. Thereupon the doctor was introduced.

"May I present," he said, "Dr. Heston Spiridon, Professor of Psychology at the local university."

Burrell glanced quickly at his wife,

saw by the expression on her face that she found Spiridon's appearance reassuring. The professor set down the small bag he carried and asked about the Burrells' baby.

"He's been in his cradle for over an hour, asleep. Shall I bring him in here and wake him?"

"No, not by any means," smiled Spiridon. "I would much rather perform this unusual attempt in his usual sleeping place."

"You see," he continued, "I must confess that I am rather excited over this business myself. To tell the truth, I have my doubts as to whether or not I'll be able to hypnotize him at all. Contrary to public opinion, it is the stronger will and more intelligent mind that makes the best hypnotic material. Children, and people with unsteady minds, are very hard—in fact, often impossible—to hypnotize."

"Do you think you can read his mind?"

"I'm not at all sure. This peculiar telepathic power is strange even to me. I'm not sure that I can always succeed in it, but it's no harm trying."

Dr. Spiridon turned to Burrell. "What was it you said that your son was saying in his sleep?"

"Just one word, doctor, 'Kalaxar'."

The experimenter nodded and repeated it to himself several times. "Come; we may as well start immediately." He picked up his bag. "Will you please take me to your son's room?"

A SMALL night-light was burning. Spiridon shook his head as Burrell moved toward the light-switch. "This is enough. We must be very quiet."

The hypnotist let down the sides of the cradle without awakening the

sleeper, then took a small flashlight and a curiously shining apparatus from his bag. The unfamiliar instrument had a plug which he fixed to a wall socket. He then motioned the others to make themselves comfortable and remain silent, drew up a chair and seated himself by the side of the cradle.

He pressed a switch on his apparatus and a low humming came from the machine, a buzzing note that seemed to rise and fall with measured pulse. He pressed the button of his flashlight and focussed a thin, bright beam of light on the apparatus for a second. The observers could see that there were four tiny mirrors revolving steadily, each for an instant reflecting a blinding ray of light. Dr. Spiridon clamped his flashlight onto the headrest of the cradle so that its beam passed over the baby and focussed on the revolving mirrors which he was holding about a foot from the sleeper's face. He moved the apparatus so that the flickering rays passed in regular routine across the child's eyes.

All were silent in the dimly lit room. Hunched up, intense, the little group sat around the cradle. There was no sound save the throbbing hum, no light save the flicker of the apparatus, for Spiridon had motioned Burrell to shut off the dim night-lamp. Slowly the baby stirred, then opened his eyes.

In an instant they focussed on the flickering light, opened wide. The baby stared in astonishment, his eyes seemed to open even wider. The rhythmic flow of the rays passed over his eyes and held him in continued amazement. The throb of the machine blended with the flow of the rays; the child still lay as he had been when his eyes first opened. He seemed held, totally occupied by the

periods of brilliant light and even more brilliant (by contrast) darkness. His baby mind was filled to overflowing with it; in a few moments the child was completely under the spell. Not a motion broke the concentration of his gaze.

Spiridon bent over the cradle. Slowly, peacefully, he whispered to the child: "Sleep, sleep, sleep." Over and over he repeated the word until the baby's eyes drooped and the lids closed. But now it was a different kind of sleep, heavy, drugged.

Dr. Spiridon lay back in his chair. He reached out, turned off the apparatus. Then, motioning to the observers to maintain silence, he passed a note over to the psychologist who read it with the flashlight. The doctor nodded.

Spiridon lay back in his chair. His eyes focussed on the baby and he seemed half to close them. His hands lay folded in his lap, and moments passed by until it seemed to the observers that he had passed into a state of semi-consciousness. Then, at length, he raised a hand and motioned to the doctor.

The psychologist bent over the baby and whispered a word softly into the child's ear.

"Kalaxar!"

THE sleeping child stirred a little, then resumed its hypnotized slumber. Dr. Spiridon slumped even farther into his seat and closed his eyes completely.

Quietly the little group of watchers sat, waiting for what they could not guess. The word had been said to the baby and it was even now touching off the train of dreams which had caused its being spoken several times before. Spiridon was silent. All was silence.

Then, Spiridon's lips moved.

He started to speak in a low, whispering voice.

"There is a great confusion, much noise and motion. I cannot seem to make anything out yet; there is only this sense of things going on around me. I imagine there are sounds and voices all about me; I am being jostled; all is vague and unfocussed."

Another period of silence. "I'll describe the general scene as well as I can when it becomes clear," said Spiridon. "You must remember, however, that when I speak in the first person, describing action, 'I' am your son in his dreams."

Silence again. Then: "Now it seems to be coming a little clearer. There is a suggestion of bodies moving about me. In my ears are the sounds of many voices and noises; the sounds of a vast multitude. I am in the midst of the throng.

"It is clearer now. I can see a man's head just in front of me; he has short, curly, blond hair. I can see a bit of pink-skinned neck and the collar of an odd-looking garment.

"Now all is bright. I am standing near the front of a great crowd of people. A platform rises up in front of me, draped in bright colors. Several men stand upon it, wearing strange clothes like none on earth: curious skirted costumes with startling designs and arabesques in bright colors on them. Two of the men wear metal helmets and breastplates bearing queer designs; they carry long and ugly-looking spears. I and the crowd are waiting for something—or someone."

Burrell had restored the dim night-light before Spiridon started giving voice to the sleeper's thoughts. He sat now, his arms reassuringly around his wife's waist.

"The faces are surprisingly alike,"

continued Spiridon. "They are all rather plump, features ruddy, skin astonishingly smooth and soft. The cheeks are puffy, eyes clear, round and blue. They all look like babies grown to maturity without losing their baby looks.

"I and the crowd are waiting for someone important. The others admire this person, but I do not. I am like the others in race and dressed as they are. I am here for some definite purpose, but what it is I cannot be sure as yet.

"The crowd and I are in a sort of park; around us stretches a level area which gives way to little hills, beautifully landscaped. In the distance, across the expanse of an artificial lake are the buildings of a city; I cannot make them out very well—the outlines are rather misty in the distance—but their architecture, even from this distance is plainly different from any with which you are familiar.

"There is a stir about me now, a raising of voices and a shouting. The person for whom all are waiting approaches.

"I crane my neck. There is an aisle through the throng behind the platform. The awaited one is coming down that aisle; I cannot see him yet. But the crowd is shouting his name. Fiffo, that is it. Fiffo. Now the group have reached the platform and are mounting it.

"Two armed men precede him as he mounts the platform and comes to the fore. The crowd about me goes wild, cheering madly. Fiffo is dressed magnificently, gleaming with ornaments and decorations. For all his splendor, his features are unpleasant—nasty—but his admirers do not seem to notice them. Only I am disgusted with the arrogant appearance of him; only I seem to no-

tice how he stands there, drinking in the approbation, leering at his followers.

"He holds up his hand and the shouting dies away. Now I know him; he is Fiffo, the dictator. Fiffo, who rules with an iron hand over Acqsar, who taxes the people to the starvation point, who races the nation toward suicidal wars.

"Fiffo speaks, promising much as usual. His voice is not unpleasant and his words are glib. He promises peace, a renewed prosperity, and national greatness. Many times he repeats the slogan, 'Peace Through War.' He will glorify and make still greater our great people; he is the leader of our destiny.

"I am moving forward through the crowd, elbowing my way up to the platform. I want to hear more of his lies, to hear them better. I am next to the platform, listening to him.

"Ah—so that is my purpose!" exclaimed Spiridon. Another brief silence, then, he continued:

"I am by the steps, near the soldier on guard. I take a deep breath, then push him to one side and dash up the steps. A dagger is in my hand; where it came from I do not know. I am shouting. The men on the platform stare at me stupidly, astonishedly. But I am there, facing Fiffo who looks at me in startled amazement.

"For Acqsar! Nothing can stop me now; I raise the dagger and plunge it into the tyrant's body. He stares at me unbelievably then sinks to the floor; nothing can be done, for my first blow has been mortal. For Acqsar! *Ka'l Acqsar! Ka'l Acqsar!*

"Soldiers are coming; a spear is being hurled, but I am contemptuous of it. I knew what this would mean

and am ready. A sharp pain stabs into me, a burning sensation. I am falling even as Fiffo fell; it grows dark and a drumming is in my ears.

"I hear a voice, the voice of the crowd. *Fiffo faruud!* Fiffo is dead! And I am dying, too, but there is a great content in my heart."

The voice ceased and Spiridon sat up, put a hand to his head for a moment, then looked about him.

"Did you hear it?" someone asked.

"When you said 'For Acqsar', the baby murmured 'Kalaxar'," explained Burrell.

"But he didn't wake up this time," added the doctor.

"WHAT DOES it mean, Dr. Spiridon? Where is this place? What is this dream?"

"It is something very close to what is called reincarnation," answered the child psychologist. "Your son has been dreaming of a previous existence; at one time in the dim past, he lived and died in Acqsar."

"But why should this one baby have retained the memory of a past life and not others?" asked Burrell.

"Perhaps because of the violence of his death in this former world and the powerful events leading up to it. This is not unprecedented. In a number of cases, it is found that some young children, usually below the age of four (in many cases, twins) know instinctively an unknown lan-

guage that can never be classified with any known earthly tongue, past or present.

"But there is no need to worry about your son; these dreams will fade away after a time. As the baby's brain absorbs the knowledge of this world, the rudimentary memories will fade into oblivion; he will know nothing of this when he is six years old."

Spiridon awoke the child quietly, then the party left the room to permit it to go to sleep again in a normal manner.

As the two doctors were preparing to leave, Elsie Burrell spoke up. "You know, several days ago I was wheeling the baby carriage along the street, and I passed Mrs. Allen who lives on the next block wheeling her child. Hers was born on the same day as mine. And would you believe it, when the baby carriages were passing each other, my baby sat up and looked at hers. And almost immediately my child gurgled something that sounded almost like 'Fiffo faroo' and then started to gurgle and chortle as if over a huge joke."

"You should have seen the Allen boy. He started to cry and scream something awful; I really think it must have been that horrible Fiffo person in him."

"It certainly sounds like it," chuckled Dr. Spiridon, "but I wouldn't tell Mrs. Allen about it if I were you."

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ON ALL STANDS



CARIDI SHALL NOT DIE

The priceless relics of the Caridi civilization were buried under one of the richest mines in the Solar System!

CAPTAIN FULSOM of the Solar Museum Expedition dropped his beam wand in despair.

"It's no use," he said, discouragement in his voice, "Can't find the slightest trace of artificially-created structures. The radio waves reflect nothing but the same old crust of Pluto."

"Then those hieroglyphics on Mars . . ." Morely began to say.

"Fakes," Fulsom broke in bitterly, "If there ever was a civilization on Pluto we would have found a trace of it by now."

Wearily, struggling with the clumsy movement of their spacesuits, they made their way back to the Rocketship Darwin.

Captain Fulsom was lost in thought, thinking of the millions invested in the expedition and wondering how he would face his colleagues back on Earth. A lost civilization on frozen Pluto! Even now he could see them laughing in the laboratories and museums of Earth. He could even hear them as they jeered.

"What!" they would ask laughingly, "traces of a lost civilization on icy Pluto? On the planet that receives 1/3600 of the sun's rays that Earth

by **WALTER KUBILIUS**

receives? So, Captain Fulsom, you chasing the ghosts of the past? Ha! Ha!"

A buzzing within his helmet interrupted his reverie. Someone was trying to call him. He turned around and saw, far on the bleak snowy mountain, a small figure leisurely waving a greeting to them.

"Must be one of the prospectors," Morley said, "hunting for barrite-crystals, the source of atomic power."

"He's probably starving for a chance to talk," Fulsom replied, "Here's hoping he hasn't got space-madness, or we'll never hear the end of his adventures."

"You can hardly blame them for talking so much. Some of them spend months all alone on a planet."

The prospector soon bounded up to them. He wore the usual apparatus. On his suit's legs were strapped pick-axes, rods and blasting equipment. On his back were two double-sized concentrated oxygen tanks. This meant he was prepared to spend more than a month away from a spaceship or camp.

He was an old man—they could see his wrinkled face and white-streaked beard through the visor of his space suit.

"Hi ya friends," he greeted them warmly, "ya prospecting?"

His voice came weakly over the suit-to-suit radio. H'm, thought Fulsom, he must have been here quite some time. His powerized battery is almost shot.

"Not exactly," he said aloud; "we're from the Solar Museum. We're hunting for traces of lost civilizations on Pluto."

A flicker of suspicion shone in the prospector's eyes and then died away. He forced a smile to his lips.

"Scientists, huh? You don't say!"

he crackled, "Use ta be a scientist myself. I'm the fellow who invented the automatic meteor-warner. Yes sir!" he added proudly, "That's me!"

Fulsom smiled. The meteor-warner was invented by nobody. It was only the logical result of years of space-traveling. Each rocketeer who ever left the Earth added something—each giving what he knew so that others would follow in the dread recesses of space. But the old prospector was a pleasant sort of liar nonetheless.

"How long have you been here?" Morely asked.

"Nigh unto twenty years!"

"Twenty years!" Fulsom repeated, aghast, "That's impossible! How do you get air, food and materials?"

"Oh, easy enough," the prospector said as his face wrinkled into a smile again. "I buy 'em from occasional prospectors and expeditions who come along. There's one around here every year or so."

"But suppose no one came for over a year?"

The prospector shrugged his shoulders and looked at the desolate scene on the Plutonian landscape. Sharp jagged mountains cut into a grim dark sky. Death was easy on Pluto.

For all he knew, Fulsom thought, the prospector may have been telling the truth. When a man travels through space for a long time he picks up strange ideas—like spending twenty years on a piece of ice. But the old prospector was pretty sane, he could see that. No space-madman had a sense of humor.

"Say!" the prospector said, "How about inviting me on board?"

"Sure!" Fulsom agreed, ashamed that he had forgotten. When a man wears a space suit for a long time he gets tired. "Come on."

Arm in arm, chatting as they went,

the trio stepped aboard the Rocket ship Darwin.

AFTER he had relaxed within the soothing warmth of the ship and had a few sips of the space-famous Mercurian tea, the old prospector began to spin his yarns. Fulsome and Morely, discouraged after months of fruitless work on Pluto, were soon smiling again.

"Why," the old man drawled once more, taking another sip of Mercurian tea, "I remember the time I got lost in the rings of Saturn with the giant of a ship I had then! By Solar! But that was a time!" he chuckled. "I moved slowly, like a worm, and wiggled my way through 'em. I got out into space pretty well for a couple of thousand miles when I look around and what do you think I saw?"

"Haven't the faintest idea," the two scientists said.

"Them moons were following me! So help me Solar! There was a string of them moons behind me! The Palomar Observatory checked up on my story and to this day you can see them on Saturn where my ship dragged them away. The Old Prospector's Strings—that's what they call them! Ah yes! Them were the days! A man could go out into space and start something or find something. Tain't like that anymore. Barrite crystal prospectors everywhere!"

"But you're a barrite crystal prospector yourself!" Morley interrupted. The old man looked at him as if he was hurt.

"That's different!" he said, suddenly changing his tone. Morely and Fulsom listened to him in surprise.

"I mean it!" he went on, "Barrite crystals are the source of atomic power. That's why everybody hunts

for them. Even me. But do you think they'd use that power successfully? For the good of the system? Building a ship to reach the stars, for example? Hell, no! They build war-rockets! Damn them!"

"Yes," Fulsom said soberly. "atomic power is a wonderful thing, but it becomes horrible when used in space-war. I've seen it."

They paused, each one in his thoughts. The old prospector, more than the others, seemed to be struggling with something. He found it difficult to speak.

"You fellows," he began hesitantly, "What are you here for?"

"We're hunting for traces of a lost Plutonian civilization," Fulsom began, "Hieroglyphics on Martian ruins pointed this way. But we haven't found anything."

"I want to show you something," the prospector said, getting up.

He walked to his space-suit hanging on the wall and paused before it as if giving himself a last chance to back down. He squared his shoulders, and trembling hands rummaged through the suit's pockets till he found the precious scrap of paper. He carefully unfolded it and tenderly carried it back and gave it to Fulsom.

"Look at this," he said, a touch of command in his voice.

Fulsom took it, glanced at it. Suddenly his eyebrows arched in astonishment.

"This is the same type of writing as the Martian hieroglyphics!" he said. "Where did you get it? Where is it from?" he demanded.

"From the Caridi," the old prospector said.

"The Caridi?" Fulsom and Morley asked, standing up, "What do you mean?"

"The Caridi," he said, looking up

at them, "was the civilization on Pluto."

"Good Lord, man!" Fulsom asked excitedly, "Have you found traces, ruins?"

"Yes," he said slowly, "I found ruins."

"Then that's why you are here!"

"Yes," he added softly, "To see that no one else finds them."

"**A**RE YOU MAD?" Fulsom broke in, "If these Caridi ruins, or whatever you call them, exist—why, they might explain the entire history of the solar system! You can't keep such knowledge hidden! Where are those ruins?"

"Those ruins go back thousands of years. I might even say," he added hesitantly, "millions. But there's one damn thing!" he shouted, "Those ruins are placed right smack upon the richest barrite-crystal layer in the entire solar system!"

The prospector stood up and nervously paced the interior of the ship. Fulsom and Morely watched as he gesticulated angrily with his arms.

"Don't you think I wanted to have capable scientists examine those traces of the Caridi and help decode the inscriptions which have baffled me? Of course I did!"

"Then why don't you?" Fulsom demanded.

"Because they would have discovered the barrite-ore underneath! There's enough there to blow up the whole system. Do you think any one planet could have kept its discovery a secret? It would have become known and the damndest interplanetary war would begin for the control of Pluto! Mars couldn't afford to let Earth control the ores and Earth couldn't trust Mars. Venus couldn't let either of them! And in the fighting that would go on here every ves-

tige of the Caridi civilization would be destroyed!"

Fulsom and Morely were stunned. The historical find of the millenium—and right on top of an unlimited source of atomic power—barrite crystals! What an irony! What planet would ever permit a leisurely examination of pre-historic ruins that would explain the dark pages of knowledge, while knowing that underneath it was an unlimited store of barrite, enough to enable it to master the solar system! It could not be done! One or the other had to be sacrificed! Knowledge would be destroyed by war.

"I think I know what we can do," Fulsom said slowly.

The old prospector looked at him and smiled, "Just what I'm doing?" he asked.

Fulsom nodded his head.

"What is it?" Morely asked.

"I could stay here," he said quickly, "and examine those ruins with the prospector. I'll put every inch of the planet under the microscope if necessary, but the secret of our solar system and its civilization must be discovered!"

The prospector and Morely listened intently while Fulsom paused.

"You," he said, to Morely, "could go back to Earth and say that nothing was found but a few traces which I am unearthing. That would satisfy the Museum. Above all, say that barrite-crystals are almost non-existent on Pluto. While planet fights planet, they must not come here!"

"We're not expected for six months," Morely said, "So I'll stay and help you."

"That's good," the prospector said, "Let's go to the fields now. I'll show you what remains of a great but lost civilization."

Fulsom went to the controls and

the Rocketship Darwin blasted away. In two days they came to a gigantic sunken valley on both sides of which razor-like hills stood protectingly. The ground was like a multi-colored candy stick laid down between two mountain ranges.

"There was a giant upheaval on Pluto countless ages ago," the prospector said, "which exposed the buried civilization of Caridi. Each layer is the history of a million years."

The rocketship descended and rested on the dark frozen soil of Pluto.

SIX MONTHS later the prospector came to Fulsom and Morely as they worked on a map, planning the next day's excavations.

"I finished the translation," he said, "of those inscriptions we found."

"Splendid!" Fulsom said, "The years you spent here were not wasted. Morely and I could never have decoded the simplest word."

Fulsom and Morely dropped their work and listened. This was a message from a people that were a million years dead when the pterodactyl screamed on Earth.

"Many were the tears shed in Caridi today," he read slowly, "for evil news has come from the third planet of our sun."

"That's Earth!" Morely shouted in surprise.

"... the colony of Caridi has fallen to the ice! The brave men who gave their lives for the glory of science shall be ever remembered in the annals of Caridi. Our colony has failed. Few are the years that remain. Here, as on the Third Planet, the dark night of the ice awaits us. . ."

The prospector put down the paper for a moment. "From here on," he

said, "I can't piece the disjointed ideas together. There is only one idea which gives itself to translation. It is this:"

"... the Caridi will be born again—on the Third Planet! . . ." They must have tried to colonize again, but failed."

"No," the prospector said, "the words are definitely *will be born* again. But that isn't all. This is what it says later on."

Carefully, testing the weight and meaning of each word, he read again.

"... the intelligences yet to be born shall not remember Caridi. To them we shall be nothing but ruins upon a frozen planet. But Caridi shall not die! It will be born again! It will live silently in the memory of the Third Planet, always there, vaguely hinting and encouraging them to find their heritage underneath our ruins . . . They shall remember, looking at the stars, only when their memory speaks in terms of hope and progress . . ."

"That heritage," Morely said, "is the barrite crystals! The unlimited source of atomic power!"

"Not only that, but in those ruins we will find the accumulated knowledge of a millions years—waiting."

"Those words, the Caridi will be born again, hint of something else," Fulsom said, nervously rereading the prospector's translations. "What is life? Is it something that is an accident in the universe? How did it come to Earth? Those life spores that some say came from the outer reaches of space—may not their source have been Caridi?"

"Some call it Caridi, others call it God!" laughed Morely.

"Did it ever occur to you," he said in answer to Morely's joking remark, "to ask why Earth has always been

practically teeming with life? Nothing ever evolved to civilization on Mars or Venus before Caridi or Earth colonized them! Only one planet in the entire solar system is immanent with life—and that planet is Earth!

"I still can't understand it all," he added, his brows hardening into lines of concentration, "But I feel that those frozen ruins outside, incredibly ancient as they are, may hold the secret of life itself!"

They were silent for a moment, awed by the full impact of the inscription they had found beneath the strata of Pluto. Each one felt his insignificance as he thought of the eons of measureless time that had passed since Caridi had known its greatness.

Their silence was suddenly broken. A shrill whistle from the control board filled the little room on the space-ship.

Surprised (for who would ever come to this graveyard planet?) they turned and watched a quivering needle on the dial.

"Space-ship approaching," Fulsom said softly.

STANDING ON the surface of Pluto, they watched the long, black space-ship descend. When the rockets had sputtered and died the trio, dressed in their heavy clauging space-suits, approached the strange ship, half in wonder and half in fear.

It was battered and worn, a space-ship that had seen many years of service in the lanes. There was something else that made them uneasy as they approached. From port-holes on the ship peered ominous and powerful ray-gun nozzles.

The air-lock opened and three men stepped forward. The first one held nothing in his hand but a metallic roll. The other two were armed.

Only a short distance separated them from Fulsom, Morely and the prospector. The leader motioned with his arm that he was ready to speak.

"Who are you?" Fulsom heard the gruff voice through the microphone of the space suit.

"Captain Fulsom of the Solar Museum. And you?"

"What're you doing here," the stranger said, ignoring the question, "prospecting?"

"Yes," Fulsom answered sharply, irritated by his manner, "Is is any of your concern?"

"Looking for barrite crystals in this valley I suppose?"

"No. There is no barrite here of commercial value to interest you," Fulsom lied, "We're examining ancient ruins of a pre-historic civilization."

The stranger laughed out loud and then cut it short with an angry snarl.

"Got a claim?"

"No. We don't need a claim. This is a scientific expedition from the Solar Museum of Earth. Who are you and what do you want?"

"My name is Bender," he answered, "Have no claim, eh? Well, you need a claim to touch land in the Solar System. Planetary Courts say so. I got a claim, a mining claim, for barrite crystals. That old buzzard there," he said, pointing to the prospector, "was around when I first laid my ship down on this valley two years ago. I recognize him."

"But I got a claim now," he shouted, brandishing the metallic roll before them, "now get the hell off my land before I order the three of you shot down!"

"You can't get away with this, Bender," the prospector broke in, "There's important work going on here! You'll smash those ruins in order to get to the barrite crystals.

You can't do that! Those ruins are important to science!"

"Damn science! Get off my land!"

"I'll appeal to the Planetary Courts," said Fulsom. "There are laws prohibiting the destruction of archaeologically valuable land."

"It will be six months by the time you get to a court," Bender sneered, "by that time I'll have enough ore ready to buy out every court from here to the sun."

"You'll pay for this," the prospector said evenly, "I'm warning you!"

"See those guns on my ship?" he said, pointing backward. "They're trained on yours. If you are not back in it within twenty minutes and set off from this valley, I'll blast your ship to pieces—and you too for that matter," he added sharply.

Fulsom and Morely, hopelessly furious with rage, cursed the fact that there was not a single gun on the Darwin. Turning away, the trio made their way slowly and despairingly to the ship. Oddly enough, the old prospector didn't seem to mind. He smiled grimly to himself as he trudged along.

WITHIN the Darwin Captain Fulsom paced the floor, pale with anger.

"It takes millions of years," he raged, "to uncover all that science has achieved in those ruins, and they'll be destroyed in six months by a bunch of barrite-stricken power-mad fools!"

"We better start going," the prospector said, "We have only a few minutes."

"We can——" Morely began, and then stopped.

"We can what?" Fulsom demanded.

"We can ram them," Morely said

quickly, "That will prevent them from destroying the ruins. Only one is needed——"

"I'll be the one!"

"No," the old prospector broke in, "There's not a chance. The ship would be shot down before it got near enough. Set the motors."

"Where to and why?"

"Up to the highest mountain so we can get a complete view of the valley. I'm going to show you what happened to me twenty years ago."

"What in the world are you talking about?" Fulsom asked, irritated.

"You'll see. I would have told you before. But you would not have believed me."

Morely turned on the power and within a few moments the rocket, blasted its way upward. When it was several thousand feet above the surface of the planet they levelled off and shot across the giant valley to a great peak in the distance. Near it they stopped and brought down the ship to rest upon the mountain top that overlooked the plain.

"Focus your telescope and watch Bender and his mob," the prospector ordered.

"I still don't get what you're driving at," Fulsom said, but both he and Morely obeyed. They aligned the telescoping sights so that a clear picture of Bender's rocket ship and his men could be seen. The black rocket was like a rotten egg lying upon a colored sea of sand.

Bender and six men, evidently the entire crew, were outside the ship. They quickly separated, each armed with a barrite-rifle and each holding a beam wand. Obviously they were losing no time for the blasting would soon begin. The seventh man, who wheeled a small carriage, was the man who would place the charges in the ground before setting them off.

AS FULSOM and Morely watched, the old prospector spoke.

"Twenty years ago," he said, "I did the same thing. What will happen to Bender and his men, happened to me. Watch."

Like seven small insects Bender and his men scurried around the ship, jubilant that underneath their feet lay an ore that would make them the most powerful men on Earth. Nothing could be seen in the entire valley but the ship and the seven dark men.

"I lied to you when I said I came here with my own ship," the old prospector continued, "I came here twenty years ago on the Balter. It's on the other side of this mountain range now. Ours was a prospecting expedition. We were hunting for barrite-crystals, just like Bender is doing. I was captain and we found that the whole valley was situated on a gigantic layer of crystals. I ordered one of my men to begin blasting. . . ."

Bender could be seen, however dimly, waving to one of his men. The man with the carriage rolled up to him. Bender pointed to a section of the valley to which the man quickly made his way. The man with the carriage bent down, removed his tools and plunged them into the earth.

"He's boring a hole before blasting," Fulsom said to Morely.

"Look!"

One moment ago the valley was empty but for seven men. But now there was an eighth!

He materialized suddenly before Bender and the man who was preparing to set the blast. His skin was dark and shone with a faint luminosity. He stood erect, bare and brawny, a head taller than the brawny and muscular Bender.

Bender reeled back in surprise.

The kneeling man stood up and walked back a few steps, stunned.

Bender must have recovered from his surprise for he moved forward a few hesitant steps toward the strange being.

They stood gazing at each other for a moment, and then Bender's arms slowly went up. The palms of his suit-encrusted hands pressed against the sides of his head and his knees buckled under him as if he were in great agony.

"For God's sake, man!" Fulsom shouted to the prospector, "explain what's going on!"

"Telepathy," he said, "There is no international language, so thoughts must be translated into words. The Caridi just drained Bender's mind of all his knowledge. Painful."

"Is that what happened to you?"

"Yes. All I got was one message: *Do not blast. These ruins are precious. There is knowledge in them.* The sudden pain passed. I turned to tell my men to remove the blasting. They laughed at me and. . . ."

"He's saying something to his men!" Morely shouted. Fulsom and the old prospector turned and looked through the telescreen in time to see the figure of Bender facing his men.

An order was given. Immediately the five who were armed unbuckled their rifles and aimed them at the strange being.

They were waiting only for Bender's command to fire.

BENDER FACED the thing again and both stared into each other's eyes. No word could be heard by the three who watched the scene from the top of the mountain, but they could sense that a battle raged between them.

One minute had passed when it appeared that the exchange of thoughts

was finished, but not to the satisfaction of Bender.

He turned and spoke to his men. At an order from him their guns spat flame.

The barrite-rifles flashed. At the apex of the bullet stream from five rifles, was the being—unharméd! He stood, unscarred and untouched, as shot after shot bounced helplessly off him.

Panic stricken, Bender's men dropped their guns and ran frantically to the air-lock of their ship. It was a race that doomed them from the beginning, for as each one ran past the being, a ray of white light flowed from his eyes.

As the rays touched each man he fell clumsily and became nothing but a mass of dead flesh and hot metal as he struck the ground. Six were killed in as many seconds.

Bender stood his ground and did not move. Whether he was too terrified to flinch or whether he was a man who faced death as he had lived life—cold bloodedly, the three men in the Darwin could not tell.

When Bender's withered body collapsed on the frozen soil of Pluto the strange being turned and looked toward the spaceship in which Fulsom, Morely and the old prospector sat.

It raised a hand in silent recognition and then disappeared.

"That being will never be seen again," the old prospector whispered as it faded away, "Its task is finished."

FULSOM TURNED to the old prospector who stood behind him, looking at the dark valley.

"Who are you?" he asked softly.

"Just an old prospector," the old man smiled, "who remembered."

"I—I can't understand it," Fulsom said, "Who was that being? Could

the Caridi foretell the future? Did they—did they know we were coming? I feel as if it is all really quite simple, that one fine day every single thing that baffles us now will be clear. It's like—like trying to recall something important that had slipped your mind."

"It takes time for a race to remember," the prospector said.

"Why do you say, 'remember'?"

"Isn't that as good a word as any? A men remembers his childhood. Why shouldn't a race remember its own? But here is a translation of the inscription on the last wall of one of the Houses of Science we excavated. I did not want to show it to you before."

He took out a small piece of pencilled paper and read.

"The three shall descend from the roof of the mountain and continue the work. They shall clear away the valley and bury the dead. And one of them shall say, I have remembered!"

"Yes! Beings of the Third Planet! You will remember! The suns grow and die in cycles that never know an end. And each star and planet, like each individual life you live, will someday become still. But we shall not die!"

"When your planet, like ours, feels the approach of death—fling the torch of life across the stars!"

The old prospector folded the piece of paper and gave it to Fulsom.

"I translated that yesterday," he said.

"Is there more?"

"Perhaps there is," he answered, smiling, "but we will get to the rest later."

It was sunrise on Pluto as the three men descended into the valley, bearing in their hands the scrap of paper.

THE YEAR OF UNITING

After ten years of scientific government, strictly planned economy and abundance for all, John Clayhorn realized that the price America paid for security was — freedom!

CHAPTER I

UNREST

THE vista had once been inviting. John Clayhorn dropped his airbrush and sighed. The chrome-finished nozzle oozed gray paint over a small section of sidewalk. He bent over lazily and snapped the catch. The flow ceased. He wiped his hands on some cotton waste and looked up again.

He remembered 59th St. as a tall row of malformed brick buildings with the sun glinting from thousands of windows at dusk and doormen standing outside under green-canvas marquees. He remembered a tumbled expanse of greenery and flowers—the south side of Central Park and airplanes occasionally winging eastward toward old Floyd Bennett field in Brooklyn. He remembered...

The Science Government had changed all that. In its first flush of enthusiasm and power, the rationalists, the technicians, had torn the jagged teeth from Manhattan's sky and set an even palisade in their place. Walls of dull, gray plastic had

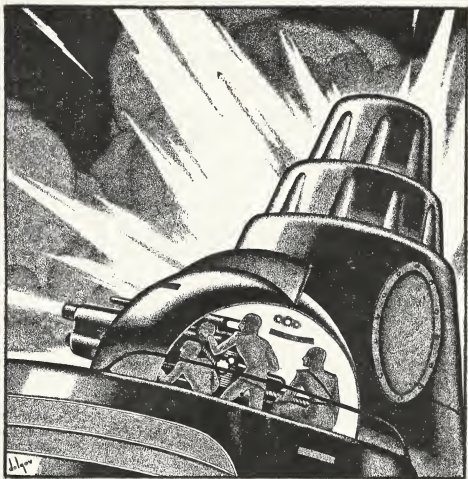
risen to previously undreamed of heights. The Park vanished and was buried under new streets and avenues paved with the same gray plastic. A great wave of reconstruction swept away the gaily colored buildings. With them went the slums, the dirt and dust. A clean city of utilitarian towers in endless rows stood in its stead.

"Clean city." He pondered the phrase in his mind and sighed again. Almost he wished for the old days as he gazed upward at the triumph of science shooting skyward on all sides about him. It had been kinder, then. Less compulsion and more time to think—really think. He appreciated his leisure—yes, everybody did. The law of the land was "enough for all" and the law had been enforced. On the continent of North America no man starved. No one could. The public storehouses were crammed with food doled out by workers to other workers, furniture created in mass-production factories in overwhelming quantities, articles of necessity to everyday life produced by the millions in deadening sameness.

Security. Security against death

A powerful novelette of the future

by **HUGH RAYMOND**



by senseless starvation. Security again pain and useless disease. Security dispensed by the ounce, the pound, the hour, the day. Security? He smiled to himself. It came at a high price. After ten years, he realized finally that the price America had paid was freedom.

He picked up the airbrush again and resumed his spraying of the wall of the three story house. Glancing down the street—once 59th—he could see an endless row of three story houses, finished in light gray. The gray clashed badly with the blue sky. The metropolis cried aloud for color and the life in color.

But the great promises had been forgotten.

He walked home that evening with a friend. It was not far from the construction site to his home—a matter of a mere ten blocks. The streets, filled with hurrying people were clean and quiet. He glanced aside from time to time, annoyed, missing the gay hum. The cheerful noises that had been part of grime and dirt—they were all gone, now.

His companion, Gregory Sanders, a similarly introspective character, noticed Clayhorn's pensive mood and shook his head sympathetically.

"I'd give a month's vacation for a

pipe and some tobacco," he remarked as they crossed the old intersection of 5th Avenue and 48th St.

Clayhorn grunted.

"Fat chance you'd have of getting any. I smoked up the last of my old brand four months ago. Threw the pipes out this morning. Couldn't stand the sight of 'em." He put his hands into his trouser pockets and set his teeth. "The way they're handling the situation is idiotic. The most irritating thing about it is that they can cut off the tobacco and alcohol supply and keep it off. The secret police—" he broke off suddenly and looked about with a faintly guilty air—"can trace any illegal manufacturing without an ounce of trouble.

"This era of 'technicians' is wonderful indeed," he grunted sarcastically, "Perfection in all ways. Perfection in production and control. It's not the way to do it. They tried prohibition once—and looked what happened. When you couldn't get it, you drank rubbing alcohol or hair tonic." He paused to relate a humorous anecdote about an old friend. "The hospitals are filling up with people gone crazy because they can't get a drag on a cigarette or a snort of whiskey. The government just won't let 'em have it."

"Shhhh, careful," admonished Sanders as they passed a traffic control. They continued to converse in lower tones.

CLAYHORN became progressively bitter.

"Jones was telling me about the parties the sequence heads throw for their women. For all their preaching and moralizing! Remember Brecker—how he used to look in the old days when the Science Government took power? You should see

him now. Fat, forty-five and goutish. His wife—God, Sanders, sometimes it almost kills me to think of what they did to this country—Anna. I saw her once a year after the overthrow. She was quite a woman—brilliant as they come, a scientist and clever as hell. I've heard stories about her that would burn the hair off your head."

Sanders pushed him out of the way of a ponderous truck.

"Power is a very dangerous thing," he replied, "in the wrong hands, that is. They promised to kill politics."

"Yeah. And sat a bunch of mechanics on the throne of empire."

"I dunno. It looked like a great set-up. Science cleaning up the corners and all that. I wonder what really happened."

They entered the tall apartment building where Clayhorn resided. Clayhorn didn't answer until the elevator had shot them to the fourteenth floor. He pushed back the elevator door and walked into the hall holding it back for his friend. He pointed to the large white sign on the wall beside the shaft, which read: Blanco level—negroes and orientals not allowed.

"Symptomatic. You can't have a united country with that sort of thing. Do you ever stop to realize that we've still got classes—not intellectual gradations, mind you, but the old divisions of race, inheritance," he unlocked his apartment door. Inside, he cast off his weather-cloak and waved his friend into a chair.

"They started out with the assumption that the people had nothing to do with telling the experts where to get off. Just stay quiet and hold out their hands for the expected flood. Where it came from was none of their business," he twirled the dials of a small radio experimentally,

got several local stations all blaring approved music and shut them off disgustedly.

"It's an oligarchy, Greg. Pure and simple. Power handed down from father to son and mother to daughter."

SANDERS stood up suddenly and put his hand in his pocket. He drew out a small instrument which blazed with a blue light.

"O. K." he said briefly, "There isn't a spy ray or dictaphone within sixty feet—meaning nobody is listening in."

"What the...." Clayhorn jumped to his feet.

"Sit down. It's just a vibration detector. England sent me directions for making it two weeks ago while you were away in the Adirondacks."

"But I was talking pure treason. Suppose they'd heard."

"Oh, I verified all clear before we got in here. Don't suppose I'd have let you babble on if the Gestapo was horning in, do you?"

Clayhorn frowned at the word usage. Among people of his ilk, the secret police of the science government had come to be known as the Gestapo, once the secret state police of the old country of Germany, because of many similar characteristics.

They both looked at each other for a moment in silence. Then, Clayhorn nodded. He went to a small cabinet in one corner of the front room of the apartment, dragged it into his bedroom and opened it with a key. Sanders, standing by, plugged a wire tap into a wall socket.

The opened panels revealed a small, but powerful micro-wave radio. The construction, to the eye of an expert was crude. The machine had been built secretly as all radios capable of

receiving waves below a certain level were forbidden.

Sanders twirled the dials. A strong hiss emanated from the machine. He looked back at Clayhorn busily drawing the blinds.

"Coming in strong, tonight."

They both knelt in front of the machine.

Twirling the dials rapidly, Sanders brought in several European stations. Milano. Broadcasting La Khovantschina. Radio Warsaw. A lecture in Polish on a new technique of brain surgery. Radio Paris. Three comedians convulsed huge audiences in Gallic tones in an ancient comedy. Stockholm regaled the hemisphere with the play-by-play description of a hockey match. A small amateur station in south Switzerland wrangled bitterly with Madagascar over the relative merits of two different schools of poetry.

The two Americans winced. This meat and drink was denied them. The official broadcasting stations of the continent filled the ether with mild pap. Elaborate, and with television, but still pap. The ocean of the ether was silent beyond the limits of the coasts.

"Careful." Sanders adjusted a small potentiometer. A shrill whine replaced the hiss. Presently the whine died. A quiet voice filled the room.

"...our friends on the American continent. This is the fourth report of tonight's broadcast. Good night, American friends. We will be on the air again at the same time tomorrow. Be sure to listen. An important announcement will be made. Attention lovers of freedom!"

"Damn!" ejaculated Sanders. "The tail end of it."

Clayhorn rolled the machine back to its corner, first pulling the power

plug from the socket. He carefully locked the panel doors and replaced the plastofilm doily. On top of this he placed a potted plant.

"Well?" Sanders stood at the front windows staring pensively at New York. The city, brilliantly aglow with light was wet under a sudden rain.

"We'll wait until tomorrow night."

The other looked at the sky.

"I miss the planes," he said, referring by inference to the ban on private airplanes imposed by the government to prevent crossing of the coastal patrols by disgruntled citizens of the state.

Clayhorn buried himself in his favorite chair disgustedly.

CHAPTER II

THE CONTROLS

HE WAS interrupted at his work the next noon by several officially clad men who produced cards identifying them as "controls" and told him to accompany them downtown. He laid down his tools quietly and washed the paint from his hands with turpentine. Donning his weather cloak, for it was raining gently, he followed at their heels. He was not surprised at the lack of handcuffs. Such methods would have been superfluous. There was nowhere to escape.

There were no jails in the Scientific State of that day. At least, no institutions so called. Opposition was never admitted openly and crime in its pettier sense had died away almost completely. Instead, a suspicious and stern government had instituted psychological hospitals where dissenters were given a careful course of reconditioning which more

often than not reconciled them to the life they were leading. Operated by the organs of power known as "controls" they functioned quietly and efficiently, ruffling the surface of affairs as little as possible. All-powerful, because the all-powerful government was behind them, they were its mainstay against any effective opposition or possible coup d'etat.

The building to which they led Clayhorn was indistinguishable from its neighbors at the southernmost tip of the island. He was taken to a large room and left incommunicado for several hours. Presently, after what seemed an interminable wait, two guards took him away. As they marched down a long corridor, Clayhorn realized that he was in the hands of the city control itself.

Though secretly a rebel, Clayhorn, had, up to now never come into actual contact with the repressive arm of the Science Government. Like most other citizens he knew the actual authority to be powerful, stern and aloof. He had never openly questioned that power. In his heart of hearts he had often imagined what would happen should his thoughts and intentions be discovered.

The Science Government, in its inevitable breakdown and degeneration reverted to the use of all the old instruments of repression. At first benevolent, the "controls" became arms of the gigantic octopus, the head of which was in Washington. With the reappearance of opposition to the powers that were, repressive measures became more and more necessary. Never apparent or on the surface,—public pronouncements kept up the false front of what had once been genuine purpose—the public heard of them vaguely or not at

all. So perfect was the system of detection, enabling the controls to pry into every phase of life on the continent, that dissenters simply disappeared without trace. No one was any the wiser; only the Chief Technician in Washington had all the facts at his fingertips.

CLAYHORN was left alone in a large domed room with a small man seated behind a desk of wonderful workmanship. He had never seen him before.

The other stood up as the guards left and bowed slightly.

"Please sit down," he said, indicating a plastic chair before the desk. When Clayhorn followed his suggestion, he resumed his seat.

The other looked at him coldly.

"You are accused," he continued evenly, "of conspiring to overthrow the Science Government. You are further accused of membership in a secret organization known as the Friends of Freedom whose aim is the destruction of the Chief Technician. Wait..." he raised a hand warningly as Clayhorn stirred, "it will do no good to deny the facts. We have investigated your case for some time."

He leaned back in his swivel chair and brought the tips of his fingers together.

"We are interested in the extent of this organization. For some reason, you have been able to escape detection up to now. Our real business, of course, is not with such as yourself. We want the leaders—who is your direct superior?"

Clayhorn smiled.

"Why do you ask me these questions? You seem to know so much already that anything I may say would be superfluous. In any case,

I deny the charge. You have no evidence against me."

"That's what you think. A powerful micro-wave receiver-sender was discovered in your apartment this morning. You are aware that such instruments are forbidden to the general public. Where did you get the parts?"

Clayhorn's eyes narrowed. What had happened to Sanders? He could not conceive of the possibility that his best friend had betrayed him to the control. But how, then, had they found the broadcasting unit?

"It is true that I have—or had—such an instrument in my possession. I was merely experimenting in certain bands of the micro-wave levels. The parts are ordinary—such as can be picked up at any radio supply depot. If you think..."

The other snapped his fingers against the desk top in a gesture.

"Citizen Clayhorn," he began, "I wish to again assure you that our evidence is conclusive. A certain Citizen Sanders has confessed and implicated you..."

A SMALL lump rose suddenly in Clayhorn's throat. Sanders had betrayed him! But another instant's thought convinced him that it could not be so. Sanders had brought him into the movement, made him see its aim and purpose, held him fast when he had wavered. Sanders was a leader, he a mere follower. No, it was impossible. Some slip must have occurred. Sanders, he knew, was continually occupied in secret propaganda work supposedly hidden entirely from the eyes of the police controls. Yet, somehow, somewhere, Sanders had been discovered. He determined to brazen it out.

"I know Gregory Sanders," he replied. "We are both employed on

a government building program," he paused and looked at his hands, "I knew of course that Sanders' viewpoints were a trifle—extreme. But I never suspected him of conducting a conspiracy against the government. As a matter of fact, I don't believe it."

The control head smiled wanly.

"You suspected Sanders of radical notions, yet allowed him access to your apartment where you kept a powerful broadcasting unit. The story is thin, Citizen Clayhorn. You are in this as much as he is. Now, are you going to confess without any further trouble—or disappear without a trace?"

The Science Government kept everyone happy, reflected Clayhorn bitterly. If they became unhappy, oblivion intervened. He pondered for a moment or two, then decided to resist. Life under the Science Government was intolerable. He had little to lose.

"I am very sorry, Citizen," he said, "but that is all I have to say."

The other shrugged his shoulders and pressed a button. Almost immediately a guard armed with an ugly weapon which Clayhorn guessed to be one of the electronic blast devices issued to the armed forces and which was still a secret, walked into the room and stood at attention.

The control head rose.

"Citizen Clayhorn is to be held until morning. See to it that he is well-fed," his mouth crinkled in a knowing smirk. "He will shortly see the error of his ways."

Clayhorn never knew where he was taken. After being marched through a long series of corridors, the path suddenly dipped downward. It ended at last at a moving sidewalk which ran through a brilliantly lighted tube. They walked aboard. No one

else was in sight. Evidently, thought Clayhorn this was a section of the transportation system unknown to the public. A sudden pressure on his ears made him suspect that they were passing under the river. After a time the tube grew larger and his ears cleared. The journey continued for about an hour.

The terminal of the moving belt was a small elevator into which the guard motioned him. They were swiftly shot aloft. Clayhorn, reflecting on the way behind, deduced that he had been taken somewhere to South Brooklyn. The ascent in the elevator lasted but a few seconds. As they were evidently far beneath the ground and since no skyscrapers were left in Brooklyn, he decided his conclusion was logical.

They emerged into another corridor where he was taken into the custody of another armed guard and led to a cell-like room. Everything had been well prepared. Even a hot meal was waiting.

The hours passed interminably. As he had neglected to wear his watch that morning when he left his apartment he had no way of knowing how much time had passed. Presently, tired of pacing, he lay down on the comfortable cot with which the cell was provided and almost immediately fell asleep.

HE WAS awakened by the pressure of a hand on his mouth. He started up, alarmed. Firm hands pressed him down to the cot.

"Quiet! It's Sanders. No, don't struggle. Listen, we have very little time. You've been condemned to be rayed out of existence. We've been trying to trace you for almost twenty hours. They got me last night but I escaped." Sanders took his hand

away from Clayhorn's mouth. He sat up and shook himself.

"Well, where to now?"

Sanders grinned.

"The Execution Chamber, Citizen—maybe." He pointed to his attire. "I'm your guard. I had a hell of a time getting in here, but they're mostly dumb. Tell 'em a funny story and you've hypnotized 'em. Come on. We've got to get out of here in a hurry. We have a little date with a fish."

He proffered his friend some food tablets and hurried him out of the cell.

"Where the hell are we?" gasped Clayhorn as he ran along behind Sanders.

The other drew his blast pistol before replying. He stepped out of the way of a prone figure, bound and gagged.

"That's your guard. Look out, don't break his neck. He's a nice chap, if a trifle thick. Want to know where we are? We're in Coney Island."

The corridor ended suddenly at an elevator door. Sanders pushed the door open and nudged Clayhorn into the compartment. A few seconds later they stepped out on the street level. It was early morning.

Clayhorn felt a sharp breeze on his face. From the appearance of the neighborhood he judged that they were near the beach, probably not far from the Narrows. Sanders urged him along.

"Don't walk too fast. It's early and hardly anyone's about. But there's no point in getting 'em too suspicious."

"Hey, what is all this about? Where are we going?"

"I said we had a date with a fish. Come on!"

After negotiating several blocks lined with beach cottages, they came suddenly to the beach itself. Beyond stretched the Atlantic. Looking due south, Clayhorn discerned the brown bulk of Sandy Hook. He shivered. The port defenses were concentrated there. Giant blast guns and heavy cannon capable of annihilating one of the old battleships at a blow. He brought Sanders up sharply.

"Now wait! There's the ocean. And there's Sandy Hook. Are you thinking of taking a raft?"

Sanders smiled mysteriously. He ignored Clayhorn's grasp and walked down the beach, beckoning the other to follow.

It was a clear, cold morning. The waves thundered onto the shore with low growls. From where they stood at the edge of the beach nothing was visible save the opposite shores. The lower end of the bays, in years past a busy cluster of ships, was empty. No stacks or sails broke the horizon.

Sanders clutched the other's arm suddenly.

"Look!" he cried and pointed. Clayhorn's eyes followed his finger and went wide.

From the waste of waters, about five hundred yards off shore a periscope had emerged. It travelled slowly down the coast, stopped, backed up a few rods and came to rest. Clayhorn's eyes went wider. A submarine began to emerge from the depths.

"That's our fish," announced Sanders proudly, "a friend from England...."

"But why...."

"It's getting too hot for us on the continent, Johnny. Look!"

CHAPTER III

ESCAPE

MEN had appeared suddenly on the small raised deck and unlimbered a small boat. A few minutes later they headed shoreward. Clayhorn and Sanders moved down to the water's edge. Peering over the heads of the approaching craft's crew, Clayhorn noticed other men aboard the submarine at the controls of a large weapon mounted on the bow which they were slowly bringing to bear on the Sandy Hook forts.

Sanders answered his unspoken question.

"If they spot us before we get aboard, we're cooked," he said quietly.

The leader of the men in the boat jumped over its side before the craft touched shore and waved to them. Clayhorn was surprised to find that it was a woman, large, tall, well built.

"Hello there," she called in a faint English accent.

Sanders shouted something.

She grasped a rope attached to one end of the small boat and pulled it ashore. She stood aside as it grounded its nose in the sand. Sanders helped Clayhorn aboard.

They made the return journey without incident. But as they climbed aboard the submarine's turret deck, one of the men on the forward deck shouted a warning.

"They've seen us. Submerge!"

Clayhorn and Sanders were hurried below but not before the former had gotten his first glimpse of a modern defensive apparatus in action. A brilliant beam leaped suddenly from the tip of Sandy Hook and crawled across the vast expanse

of water which boiled into steam in its wake. Swiftly the deadly electronic stream approached the steel fish lying quietly in the water, exploding everything in its path, air, water vapor and all. Clayhorn pausing at the hatch felt a shiver pass down his spine. In a few seconds the vessel would be melted to a shapeless blob.

BUT nothing of the sort happened. Instead a deep whine arose from the interior of the submarine and instantly a faint violet aura formed about the ship. An instant later the beam hit the protective screen and was deflected in ten different directions. The ocean bed erupted.

"Wait!" shouted Clayhorn as Sanders tried to pull him down. He wanted to see the end. The men at the bow were busy with the ugly-snub-nosed weapon. Frantically they managed to get it aimed in the proper direction and fired. In a second it was all over. Twenty miles away, the extreme tip of Sandy Hook vanished in a terrible burst of atomic flame.

The distant eruption continued for several minutes. Then, other forts began to get into action.

But now the submarine was submerging. The men abandoned the weapon and leaped to the bridge. Clayhorn, willy-nilly was pushed down the steel ladder. The last man down secured the hatch.

The two Americans felt the craft suddenly lurch forward under a terrific impetus.

Sanders looked at Clayhorn, standing a trifle dazed at the bottom of the hatch. Men were still pouring down from above.

"Well, we may not know where we're going but we're on our way."

"Good work, Sanders," said a feminine voice.

They both whirled. A woman stood beside them. Several sailors saluted her. She waved them on. Clayhorn gasped. On her shoulders was the insignia of a high naval officer. She was dressed natively in a blue sea-suit.

Sanders saluted.

"Captain Marsh?" he asked.

"Captain Marsh," she replied. "Will you gentlemen come to my cabin, please?"

She stalked off down a short corridor followed by Sanders who pulled Clayhorn, still dazed, along with him.

Her cabin was comfortable and well-fitted. Clayhorn was amazed to discover that the vessel was thoroughly up to date, equipped with every modern convenience and some he'd never seen before. She sat the both of them in comfortable chairs in front of her desk and rummaged in a drawer.

"Smoke?" she asked, finally straightening. Unconcernedly she lit a cigarette from the small plastic box herself and laid the container before them, smiled at Clayhorn's amazement.

"Are you astonished to find that we still practice the barbarous art? I know it is prohibited on the American continent. We of the 'depressed' areas of the world find it easier to eliminate it slowly by persuasion than by compulsion. Such methods are relics of the old order—eh," she laughed and sat down behind the desk, "I had forgotten that Americans know very little of what goes on outside of their hermetically sealed country. Well, Sanders," she said abruptly, "what news."

The other made a brief report on the condition of the internal affairs

of the Science Government. Clayhorn, listening carefully, was astounded at the extent of his friend's knowledge. He realized now that Sanders was more than a mere worker on a construction job.

THE captain nodded as he talked. Finally she held up a hand.

"That is splendid. And the information will be extremely useful. But now, as to your friend..."

"Yes," said Clayhorn suddenly, "Now as to me. To be frank I cannot understand why you've gone to all this trouble to save me. I am not important, I possess no state secrets."

"For that, Clayhorn," she replied, "we will have to go back into world history. As you probably know through our broadcasts from Europe, the entire world except for the Science Government and the areas it controls is united in a confederacy of states. Immediately after the establishment of the Science Government on the American continent, the war in Europe came to an end. Realizing the economic potentialities of a hostile Western Hemisphere, the peoples of the rest of the world overthrew their old governments and established true democracy throughout Europe, Africa and Asia. The discovery of atomic power control which came almost simultaneously in America and Russia resulted in the complete destruction of the old order.

"For fifteen years this state of affairs has continued—the co-existence of two halves of the world—one a well-knit union of democratically created ethnological units based upon a developing science and social theory, the other a tyrannical, degenerate and disintegrating state founded primarily upon the principles of the

old order and doomed inevitably to destruction.

"We of the former group have not interfered in American affairs until lately. Your government, after all, has attempted no war-like acts. That it is now contemplating such action we now know. The average citizen of the Science Government has no inkling of this, of course.

"The American continent has been sealed away from the rest of the world for a decade and a half. Few of its citizens have any clear idea of what goes on outside it. Therefore, they are unable to make any comparison between the state of life in their country and in ours. They do not realize, for instance," and she paused and smiled somewhat self-consciously, "that women are no longer considered an inferior sex. In the World Confederation woman is accorded her rightful place, which is side by side with man in the conduct of the affairs of the planet. They do not know that we have done away with all forms of discrimination—and such is not the case in your country. Race prejudice has been ended forever. The Science Government, founded principally by the representatives of a certain pseudo-scientific sect of technology-worshippers carried over with it all their defects and hidden decay. A nation divided against itself cannot stand. Your continent is split in a thousand different ways."

CLAYHORN nodded. He thought bitterly of the social ostracism accorded his mother who had been a member of one of the so-called inferior races.

"The World Confederation was founded by a great upsurge of starving war-torn people everywhere, goaded into overturning the old

order by necessity. No such possibility exists in the Science Government, no one starves or dies needlessly. Yet, their minds are not free. The tragic thing about it all is that most of them do not realize it. Isolated brains—yourself, Sanders—became aware of the realities of the situation but can do nothing about it.

"The Confederation, for economic and social reasons, cannot advance further in the development of science and civilization without the cooperation of the other half of the world. That half of the world is sealed off from us. Eventually the barriers would crash, yes, as subtle forces of decay work, but we cannot wait. And as an upsurge from beneath is impossible in the science government, we of the new world must take things into our own hands. We are justified, remember, because we are threatened with eventual attack; the change then, must come from above.

"You are a minor part of our plans, Clayhorn. You will be taken to England and subjected to a series of questions by certain scientists who will then decide the best possible means of psychological attack upon your country. It lies entirely in the realm of possibility that we could wage successful war upon the science government. A new invention—you saw it applied some time ago—makes it possible to screen off the blasts of electron guns. But this it is impossible for us to carry through. The world would be laid waste once more. Bloodshed and suffering would be the lot of millions, we would defeat ourselves morally."

Clayhorn nodded again, crushed out his cigarette.

"I understand," he said and glanced at Sanders, who stood up.

"I'd better be running along to

your engineer," he explained, "want to show him this little toy of mine." He drew the stolen blast pistol from its belt and ran a finger along the shiny barrel.

"Wait!" The woman rose. "I think the occasion calls for a drink," she said, smiling at Clayhorn. She went to a wall cabinet, brought out several glasses and a bottle of tawny port.

"Good wine this, you'll appreciate it, Clayhorn." She laughed and handed him a filled glass, "This is another little vice we believe in abolishing by persuasion." She handed another to Sanders and raised her own.

"To the World Confederation, my friends and the new dawn for all mankind."

Clayhorn felt tears well from his eyes. He laughed gratefully and downed the drink.

CHAPTER IV

RESPITE

THE submarine reached England in five days, having run the coast blockade without incident. She landed at Plymouth. Clayhorn was immediately taken ashore and entrained for London where he was given over into the hands of a waiting committee of scientists. Sanders in the meantime reported to military headquarters.

They questioned him thoroughly until he felt like a well pumped dry. Life, in the other half of the world was certainly different. They were thorough, precise, efficient, but above all human. No insistence on the outward shape of things but a deep concern with inner, conflicting forces. In the presence of these capable, quiet men he felt safer than he had ever

felt before in his life. He felt himself expanding mentally, too. Close at hand to the everyday life of the English part of the confederation, he felt deeply and sincerely its rich, varied color and warmth. The stress of continued obedience to some hidden power was gone. The faces of the people were clearer, brighter. Laughter filled the air incessantly. Here, everywhere, life was moving forward, quietly, but with purpose and direction. In London Clayhorn saw the emergence from the darkness of the past decades of the true creative power of the peoples. Linked to the enormous impetus given all branches of endeavor by the discovery of atomic power control they had accelerated progress to an amazing degree. From the wreck of the last World War had risen a towering structure of immense strength wherein the individual worked for the happiness of all and the mass co-operated for the happiness of the individual.

He was astounded too to witness the diversity of cultures existing in London. The policy of the government had been to nourish the cultures of the various nations, especially those smaller peoples held down under national oppression for centuries, until at last a true seed of one great planet culture would be planted and flower in full bloom. Used to the dull, oppressive sameness of the utilitarian culture of the Science Government, Clayhorn was overwhelmed. For days he revelled in strange music, costumes, languages. Presently it was no longer a novelty to see a Chinese, a Hindu, a Russian and a Central African on the same street.

He toured Europe, flying from country to country in a mighty bird of transparent plastic. It was his

first airplane flight. In Vienna, dazed somewhat by the charm of the old Austrian capital which had been rebuilt with an eye toward nostalgia he fell in love and was married there.

In six weeks the Clayhorns were back in London. Before the examining board again, Clayhorn was informed that he had been selected for an important mission in the American Continent.

HE looked at Breckinridge, the head psychologist, tall, bearded, a sly humor dancing in his sharp eyes.

"You want me to fly there?"

"There is no other way. The coast defenses are impenetrable." He turned to a gorgeously uniformed staff officer, "You vouch for that, Citizen Commander?"

The other nodded.

"There is no other way. The coast guard cannot be pierced," he continued. "We can land you safely and of course there is every way of hiding you successfully until an opportunity came to act. We know that the weakness of the Science Government military forces lies in its air arm. As flight is prohibited throughout the country due to the fear of mass escape, their air force is necessarily small. Since the invention of the electronic blast, the airplane has completely lost its offensive power anyway. But with this new screen, any modern type plane could reach the capital providing it were not attacked by old-style weapons firing solid shot."

"Is the plane armed?"

"Of course. With electronic blast guns and two old machine guns taken from the military museum in Berlin."

"And your plan of action...?"

"Abner Curtis, the Chief Technician of the Science Government, speaks to the people on May 21st—June 3d on your obsolete calendar. His own psychologists have informed him that the state of unrest within the country is reaching a new peak. This we knew from our own sources—chiefly deductive. From our analyses of the psychologies of peoples crushed under dictatorial oppression—you may believe that from our own experiences we know what we're talking about—we conclude that the only possibility of effecting a transfer of power from one man to another lies in the possibility of successfully opposing stronger forces to his. In the light of what we have learned concerning mass psychology this will be sufficient to also effect a transfer of mass self-interest. Once this has been accomplished and temporary chaos established, we can intervene in a military sense and turn the power over to your people themselves."

He paused, turned and considered a sheet of paper lying on his desk.

"You will fly unescorted to some point on the American coast which will make it convenient and easy for you to once more establish yourself as a citizen. Suitable papers have been prepared and are waiting. The necessary records have already been altered in Washington by one of our spies who died in the attempt. Once established you will contact our second agent who will give you further instructions."

CLAYHORN arose.

"What makes you think this course of action will succeed?"

Breckinridge stroked his beard. A hard light came into his eyes as he remembered old battles.

"It has happened that way several

times before," he replied, simply. "You will do it?"

"I'll do it. Thanks for the opportunity. May I take my wife along?"

"We were going to suggest that. It will be difficult for her to enter the country, of course. She speaks English perfectly, but her knowledge of the situation is limited. Still there are many reasons why she might be helpful." Breckenridge turned to the Commander. "Is everything ready?"

The morning of departure was gray and cloudy. Breckenridge alone saw them off. A few seconds of warming up the powerful atomic motor and the giant warplane was moving slowly down the airfield. Gathering speed it took the air.

An hour later they were flying over Land's End.

From time to time they passed units of the World Confederation's high seas fleets plowing north and south on their ceaseless patrol of the coasts. Far below, the enormous battleships churned on at terrific speeds, their mighty blast guns uncorked for instant action.

At noon, Clayhorn's plane passed within sight of New York.

"How much further?" His wife, Maria, bent toward him. She scanned a map of the coast.

"The military command advised me to land near Washington somewhere. The agent we must contact is there. Better put your parachute on."

Nearing the capital, he headed the plane out to sea, then swerved in sharply toward the coast, rocketed up to forty thousand feet and set the controls.

"Ready?" he had opened the door of the cabin and stood steadying himself against the blast. His wife moved to his side, took his arm and together they jumped. Behind, the plane abruptly changed its course and

headed out to sea where it plunged some hours later and rapidly sank to the bottom.

CHAPTER V

UNDERGROUND

CLAYHORN and Maria landed in the middle of a large cornfield. They came down rather hard because they were using only one parachute. The corn field was in the middle of one of the large mechanized farm entirely unattended during that time of the year. Consequently they landed unobserved. Clayhorn haunted one of the roads until a small atom-powered car came along, signalled it, overpowered the driver, killed him and hid the body in some bushes nearby.

"It was necessary," he said, comforting Maria as she had shrunk, horror stricken from the corpse. She was not used to the sight of violence.

Within two hours the car was within sight of the capital buildings. Clayhorn has to slow down suddenly as the flow of incoming traffic suddenly increased. Presently they came to a long thin line of men standing athwart the paved plastic road who were examining each car.

"What's the matter?" asked Clayhorn as his own machine drew up to the line of armed men. A burly guard thrust his head within the car.

"Dunno. Some sort of sudden emergency declared or something. Know as much about it as you do. Anyway, we'll have to search your car. Got any papers?"

With relief the spy saw both his papers and Maria's examined and handed back with no slight sign of suspicion. Folding the papers and putting them away, he stepped on the gas and breathed deeply as the

line was left behind and the city approaches drew closer.

"Close call," he said cryptically to Maria and she nodded. For awhile she was entranced by the unfamiliar look of the country, stern, stiff, somewhat prim and dull. As they went on, however, the character of the suburbs and then of the city changed. Washington, for sentimental reasons had never been altered to the status of a modern city, except for the gigantic citadel which guarded it to the north, was the actual nerve center of the whole continent and served as the personal fortress of Abner Curtis, the Chief Technician himself.

"I have a hunch that nut is going to take some cracking," said Maria, referring to the sketchy plans Breckinridge had outlined to them before they left.

"We'll get in. I will, anyway. Now we've got to find Thompson."

In a little street somewhere in the old negro section, in the basement of a dilapidated house they found the agent. The house bore the sign "Radios repaired." Clayhorn left Maria and the car at the curb and knocked at the basement door. He noticed that the rest of the house was unoccupied.

Presently the old wooden door opened and the face of a small, wizened man peered out. Clayhorn held his right hand in a peculiar signal.

"London," he said softly.

"New York," came the answer in rapid tones. Then the door swung wide and he was beckoned within.

INSIDE, the little man snapped on a light.

"Gawd!" he exclaimed. "I thought you'd been caught. Intelligence noti-

fied me just a few days ago. What's new?"

Clayhorn looked around before replying. The basement room was littered with junked radios and thousands of parts. Several machines with tags rested on the floor. In a far corner, partly hidden behind what looked like an old washing machine, he discerned the outlines of a powerful transmitter.

The little man, following his eyes smiled.

"It's a good decoy—but strictly on the level. I've been making a living out of repairing radios for five years, ever since World Intelligence sent me over and reporting at night via that broadcaster."

"Ever been under suspicion?"

There was a low chuckle.

"Lots of times. All dealers in radio parts are strictly watched especially those who purchase raw materials which might be used for micro-wave sets. My own machine is a whiz. Looks like it couldn't receive—looks like a receiver, doesn't it?—but the works are concealed beneath the dummy parts. Just turn a switch and up she pops. Well, as I was saying what's new?"

Clayhorn related to him as much news of home as possible. Then he told Thompson he had a car parked outside.

"Good! Your wife's with you, you say? Say, brother, you must be a genius for having gotten past the shore patrols with her! Anyway here's the plan. Curtis broadcasts to the entire continent on June 3rd. We have reason to suspect that he is going to make the speech an opportunity for declaring war on the World Confederation. We even suspect that he intends to order his fleets to attack before the broadcast is begun, but we aren't sure. In any case,

nothing really dangerous is going to happen because his blast guns can't penetrate the new wave-shields some of our own boys invented a few years ago. O, you saw it work, eh?" he paused while Clayhorn related his experience during the attack on the submarine.

"It's absolutely unbreakable," continued Thompson, "and you might wonder why we simply don't allow the American air-fleets to break their silly necks on our wave-shields. There are good psychological reasons—but I suppose Intelligence made the case clear before you came over."

Clayhorn nodded.

THE little man scratched his head and frowned.

"June 3, at 12 o'clock noon is Zero Hour. By that time we've got to get you into the citadel and in a position to completely disrupt the whole complex of control communication all over the country. The ticklish part of the problem is that the disorganization must begin precisely at the moment it appears that Curtis is nearing the end of his speech, because by that time the combined Grand Sea and Air Fleets of the Confederation will be within striking distance of Washington and already poised to make a show of force over the whole country from bases in the Atlantic, Pacific, and the lower Arctic."

"Is the citadel well-guarded? It may seem strange for an American to be asking questions about his own capitol, but we really know very little."

"I understand. Curtis' roost is the nearest thing to complete isolation anywhere in the world and heavily defended. The base of the structure is completely surrounded by row on row of the biggest blast guns they've

got and more guns are mounted on every level. Crowning the top is a single, gigantic whopper of a cannon, probably the most powerful instrument of destruction in the world. This is mounted behind a transparent shield of some new substance which like the wave-shield is also impervious to the blast rays but still extremely scarce. As a matter of fact, outside of a few pieces in the New York laboratories and a small fragment which was stolen and sent to London there isn't a scrap of it anywhere else in the world. The shield is another reason why we must strike and strike to win. If enough of the stuff can ever be made the world is in for a few centuries of uninterrupted warfare because the armaments and defenses are basically the same," he paused and suddenly smiled.

"You won't like what I'm going to say now because it's going to mean hard work. The only way to get into the citadel is to get a job there. I can do this. We were informed some days ago that a complete change of the household staff is impending and I have some connection in the citadel—merely friends who think I'm what my shingle says I am."

Clayhorn shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm in this to the end. I'm yours to command, and my wife also."

"Good. Now listen."

Twelve hours later, they had Maria lodged in one of the bigger hotels for transients with strict instructions to keep in touch with Thompson. Then the little repair man and the American began the first step of the long series of examinations which finally culminated in Clayhorn's gaining admittance to the citadel in the guise of a porter. He was fortunate in being assigned to the fiftieth floor, which was within

six stories of the top and the great defensive shield. As he parted from his friend who had accompanied him as voucher throughout the wearisome interrogations, he looked over his shoulder. The attendant in whose charge he was left had his back turned.

"Thompson. How many days left?"

The little man scurried close.

"Eight. Today is the 26th of May. Remember, use discretion and follow instructions to the letter."

"You'll take care of Maria?"

"Quiet. They probably have detectophones all over the place. Good-bye."

Clayhorn watched the retreating figure of the little spy sadly. Then he turned to his duties.

CHAPTER VI

A TOMORROW IS BORN

THE first four days in the citadel were probably the most boring stretches of time Clayhorn had ever experienced. His duties were exasperatingly slight and gave him no opportunity at all to leave the fiftieth floor. It was only on the sixth day, when he was beginning to get panicky that an opportunity presented itself. He noticed that occasionally a call would come from the top level for certain refreshments kept on the fiftieth level which was to a great extent one large food store house, occupied mainly by refrigeration units in which was stored rare viands and beverages. Usually some trusted and well-liked servant was selected for the job.

In the space of twenty four hours, Clayhorn made himself well-liked at the expense of a lot of his own self-

respect. He was called upon after that once, twice and to his great relief a third time. The duties consisted on all three occasions of conveying magnums of California champagne to the receiving porte on the top level where they were handed over to a portly attendant, uniformed as was Clayhorn, but more gorgeously. The third time he detoured on his way back to the lifts and was rewarded, by a chance open door of a full view of the interior of the great Control Center room. He managed to get a single look at the intricate banks of panels lining the walls, then someone behind the door shut it. Whistling, Clayhorn continued on his way.

The morning of the 3rd of June dawned very bright, clear and sunny. The spy was kept busy from six until eight A. M. on the top level repairing some of the damage done to the private quarters of the Dictator by a large private party thrown the night before by the Chief Technician himself. He was returning to the lifts with an immense wheeled cart carrying soiled dishes and glasses when the door of the Control Center Room opened, three magnificently uniformed officers stepped out and disappeared around a corner of the corridor talking excitedly.

Clayhorn saw his chance. He swiftly wheeled the cart to a disused service elevator, disposed of it quickly, and returned running on padded shoes to the all-important portal. Casting a quick glance about, he cautiously stuck his head through the door, saw that the place was empty and rapidly secreted himself behind a large stack of unloaded record plates which were to be placed in the directional beam broadcasters immediately Abner Curtis had finished his broadcast. Scarcely had he hid-

den himself when the officers returned. Though attired in the best the Scientific State could afford, they were merely technicians and through a chink in the stack, the spy watched them cut in the powerful generators which were to hurl the war speech of the Chief Technician broadcast to the entire American Continent.

An hour passed.

At a quarter to eleven several armed guards entered the room and demanded to know whether the technicians had seen a missing servant. After hot denials, the soldiers left. Secure behind his barricade, the spy smiled grimly.

Precisely at noon one of the men glanced toward a red signal which had suddenly appeared on a control plate, threw in several switches and suddenly a deep high whine filled the atmosphere. The Dictator was on the air, speaking from the confines of his private apartment which occupied the exact center of the top level and which were separated from the Control room by several circular corridors running entirely around his private suite.

CLAYHORN, tense behind the stack of metal plates waited until the chonometer on his wrist showed fifteen minutes to noon, then decided upon action. By this time he thought, the military forces of the Confederation should be approaching the coasts and would certainly be intercepted within ten minutes by the far-flung patrols.

Using the raucous tones of the Chief Technician coming through over a small inter-office communicator as a cover up for any slight noises he might make, he waited until the backs of the three officers were turned toward the main controls, then darted forward, seized a blast

gun from the hip holster of one of them as he passed and without stopping, rayed them out of existence. Simultaneously there was a series of tremendous crashes as the gun went off and three immense gaps appeared in the panels behind the men. Clayhorn finished off the rest of the intricate control system rapidly. In thirty seconds the country was disorganized, completely out of touch with the citadel, a pitifully vulnerable thing once its outer shell had been cracked.

He stared around him at the smoking ruins. Hearing the sound of swiftly approaching feet, he dashed to a door opposite the one by which he had entered, ascended a short flight of steps and suddenly emerged upon a six foot square platform that commanded a view of the entire private suite of the Dictator, which was completely enclosed in a dome-like sheathing of the new substance of which Thompson had spoken. Below him, fifty feet away, chaos reigned.

Abner Curtis, a tall, impressive figure was standing close to a microphone bellowing orders and pointing to the sky. The spy's heart leaped. His eyes followed the direction of the gesticulating hand and suddenly his blood went icy cold.

A small plane, enveloped in the violet wave shield was diving on the citadel. As it swooped close, Clayhorn saw at the controls the small figure of Thompson and the larger figure of his wife, Maria. Apparently the spy had managed to secure a plane and well equipped.

Clayhorn gripped the butt of his blast gun preparatory to levelling it at the Chief Technician, then suddenly relaxed as he realized that nothing could get through the impenetrable dome. Roundly, he cursed, himself,

the Dictator and Thompson. Frantically he cast his eyes downward.

Beneath the dome, an aide was handing the Dictator a slip of paper, evidently a report from the coastal patrol control which must have come in over an old-fashioned wireless system as the whole complex nerve center of the continent had been effectively destroyed. Curtis glanced at it rapidly, went red and white several times in succession and stepped back from the broadcasting platform and the useless microphone. He retreated hurriedly to a concentration of small blast cannon mounted to one side of the great energy projector which dominated the exact center of his quarters, raising his hand in a signal and suddenly the dome divided and began to disappear into gigantic curved slots.

"Fire!" he screamed. The command came plainly to the waiting spy as the defense shield slid rapidly away.

THE stream of energy blasting outward caught the approaching plane square—and was deflected instantly, though the impact threw the machine upward in a wild swoop. The air above the citadel exploded suddenly into terrible gushes of brilliance, temporarily dimming the sun. Far off on the rim of the capital, buildings hit by the rays glancing off the shimmering wave shield collapsed in shuddering ruin.

Now, Thompson, recovered from the initial blow was swooping again. He cut his power, banked sharply and deliberately rammed the ship atop the giant cannon. The mass of machinery, all delicate steel and quartz prisms, toppled over with a titanic crash and smashed itself to atoms on

the solid plastic of the heavy floor. Beneath it, a crushed blob, lay Abner Curtis.

Clayhorn's wife crawled out of the wreckage and ran toward the broadcasting platform, carrying a small portable sending apparatus. Several officers attempted to stop her. Staggering under the weight of the boxed transmitter she lost her head and wavered. Then from behind came a sharp chatter of machine gun fire. The men went down, blood pouring from gaping wounds. She raised her head and glanced back. Thompson was manning the plane's ancient machine guns, laying down a relentless curtain of fire behind her.

Now Clayhorn went into action. Leaping in a daring arc to the floor of the top level he swept the rest of the roof clear of life, then turned to his wife. She was already unlimbering the broadcasting set and with deft hands was swiftly connecting the microphone her husband had previously made useless. As soon as the thunderous roars of Clayhorn's blast gun had died away, she seized the instrument and turned on the power of the set's small atomic plant.

"Peoples of America!" she cried and swayed, "Take the state into your own hands! This is your day of freedom, the year of uniting!"

Behind, sitting in the pilot's seat, uncomfortably caught beneath some bent aluminum spars, still dazed by the crash, Thompson raised his eyes to the heavens as a buzzing roar began and grew in volume.

Out of the east, from fifty thousand feet above, massed in irresistible power, the sun-light glinting from thousands upon thousands of sky-flung wings, the future was approaching at lightning speed.

WHEN ANTEROS CAME

by JAMES BLISH

Twelve pounds overboard was a matter of life and death!

THE CABIN of the *Columbia* resembled the cab of a twentieth-century locomotive in more ways than shape. For one thing, this was the last lap of the Earth-Jupiter and return race, the stiffest space competition in the system, and the throttle was all the way open; orange and red flame raged like a kerosene-fed bonfire from the stern jets, leaving a wake of dense, swirling black smoke that wreathed the bases of the tubes as well as the tips as it was forced out of the Venturi orifices by the power of the blast. Consequently the cabin was hot enough to fry even such veterans as Duke and myself.

The pilots held similar positions, too. While I leaned out with my head in the bulging isoglass dome that gave us our only forward view besides the periscope (we had sacrificed the usual forward view-plate so that we could pack in another fuel tank) and kept my hand on the pilot wheel and my feet on the throttles, Duke squeezed back and forth down the short catwalk and nursed the engines. Now and then he rapped out a staccato report to Earth with that machine-gun key finger of his (we had dropped the weight of our phone somewhere out by Pallas).

So far, our calculations had proven all right. We had snaked neatly through the asteroid belt without having had to swerve once from our predetermined course, and I thanked the gods, and more particularly, Lane, my chart man on Earth. It was lucky in more ways than fuel saving, too. Duke insisted on remaining standing all during the transit of the belt, and—well, you dock-men who have to go into ships that have met unexpected meteors and scrape the passengers off the walls know what I mean.

Duke made his way forward and lurched into a seat before the chart table, rubbing

through the periscope toward the rear, adjusting the telescopic attachment.

"*Sky-Stone*," he reported. I grunted and kept my eye on the detector meter. *Sky-Stone*, huh? That was Petrucelli, Italy's entry, whose name, oddly enough, meant "meteor." He was our biggest competitor, with Davis, English pilot in a new *Morrene*, a close second. The rest had taken the easy vault over the asteroids and so were far behind. Davis was still in the belt, and there was still the chance that he wouldn't come out; but Petrucelli was right behind.

I eased up a little on the throttle. The *Sky-Stone*, I felt sure, planned the direct Oberth brake-circuit around the Earth, but my course, thanks to our low fuel consumption, laid out a swing around the moon and then a flat gravity-drop to the field. If everything went well, we would beat him in by about half an hour.

Things looked rather bad at present, though. Petrucelli's engines, always the unknown quantity in Lane's equations, had proven themselves the equals of our own, and as I jockeyed my feet on the throttles, halting the acceleration for the moon loop, his ship began to creep up on us, finally appearing in the distance to the unaided eye. I built the speed up as high as I dared, but still the sleek, bullet-like ship edged forward, until it was right up even with us, and I could see the head of the *Sky-Stone* across the intervening half mile through his forward viewplate.

HERE I lost all caution and forced in the pedals again. Petrucelli stopped gaining, but now we were flying about even,

(Continued On Page 146)

PRIME BASE

by The
EDITOR

THERE'S good news on page four for all of you readers who wrote in asking for another look at Ray Cummings' famous novel, "Into the Fourth Dimension," perhaps one of the most unusual science-fiction tales written. There have been a number of stories dealing with the fourth dimension, but this seems to be one aspect of stf where nearly every author has a different idea upon the subject.

We think you'll approve both of Hannes Bok's cover and Dolgov's double-spread. Both artists took a bit of liberty with the story; the cover, for example, does not illustrate an actual scene from the story, and there are items in the interior picture which are not in the scene, either. But we feel that we have given a stronger impression by these liberties and trust those of you who search for fly-specks on stf's cathedral windows will forgive us. Why not write in and let us know if you approve of impressionistic drawings at times?

MORE good news for those of you who have requested that we obtain "Around the Universe," Mr. Cummings' longest and best-liked "Tubby" story. This will be found in our sister book, *Future Combined with Science Fiction*, which should be available at your newsstands at fifteen cents the copy. If you can't find it there, you can order it directly from our 60 Hudson Street office; simply enclose the correct amount in stamps or coins.

The current *Future*, we might add, also contains a collection of short stories you won't want to miss. There's "Destiny World," second in the popular Ajax Calkins series of stories, by Martin Pearson; "Day of the Titans," a dandy novelet by Fred Kummer, Jr.; "Salvage Job," by a new writer, Leslie A. Crouch; "Space Episode," by Leslie Perri, and several others. Hannes Bok has done a really outstanding cover for an unusual item, an extravaganza by Wilfred Owen Morley entitled "No Star Shall Fall," and the interior pics are by Dolgov, Bok, Forte, and Damon Knight. Plus the increasingly popular departments:

Station X and Futurian Times. All in all, the December *Future* is an issue you'll be glad you didn't miss.

THERE have been a good many stories in stf books past and present dealing with social upheavals of tomorrow, with the rise and fall of dictatorships, with utopias, scientific and otherwise. There have been tales dealing with strictly "scientific" societies. Well, Hugh Raymond and your editor got to discussing the matter one day and the following subject came up: what might a strictly "scientific" society which discarded the idea of democracy be like? Suppose a setup were made in which there actually was enough for everyone, a society wherein there was no poverty, no unequal distribution of goods and services, no insecurity. Everything you wanted, only without democracy, without the man in the street having any say in the way things were run? We think Raymond has done a good job on this problem in "The Year of Uniting" and we'd like to hear your comments.

THERE'S still more good news for those of you who have asked for S. D. Gottesman. He's here, with bells on, presenting "Sir Malkory's Magnitude." It's a sort of combination mystery and stf tale with just a touch of the Gottesman humor.

JUDGING by the comments we've received, the Summer Quarterly went over pretty well with you. "Tarrano, the Conqueror" was easily a first-placer, while "Earth Does Not Reply" came out on top among the short stories. But a good many of you seemed to think that four stories were too few per issue. Well, we're doing something about that right away. See our contents page.

WE recently received a letter from John M. Cunningham, Director of the British Science Fiction War Relief Society. Mr. Cunningham says in part: "The main purpose of the BSFWRs is not only

to supply British fans with stf magazines by itself, but also to stimulate in others an interest in so doing. In order further to simplify and help, I am sending free to all who request same, magazine holders—which hold magazines in flat condition and permit them to be sent at the printed matter rate (1½¢ per 2 ounces). These holders come in three sizes and it would be well to let me know what magazines you contemplate sending to Britain so that the correct size holder can be supplied you. All that is necessary is to slip the magazines in the holder, wrap (as you would a package) strong twine around holder to keep them from slipping out, address same and mail them.

"At this time there is a serious need of unused US stamps by the BSFWRS for the purpose of mailing copies of stf magazines now in stock. We would appreciate your donations for this purpose, any amount, large or small would be appreciated. Stamps should be in small denominations: ½¢, 1¢, 1½, 2, 3, 4 or 5¢ varieties."

A pledge of support for the BSFWRS was on display on the recent Denver Convention for science fiction followers, and a resolution of approval in regard to the society was passed unanimously. If any reader of *Science Fiction Quarterly* is interested in cooperating with the BSFWRS, Mr. Cunningham's address is: 2050 Gilbert Street, Beaumont, Texas.

MALLORY KENT writes: "For me, the strongest point about Cummings is the obvious fact that he has lived very close to real people. It shows up in all his writings. His villains are never horrible monsters of utter evil; most often they are sincere individuals with just the wrong slant in their personalities. Tarrano, for example, obviously suffered from an inferiority complex which drove him to Napoleonic-like attempts at conquest. But he had his high points, too, and, had he lived at a time when kings and emperors were essentially a progressive institution, he would have been a great figure.

"And, likewise, the heroes aren't all that's good, holy, and courageous. They have plenty of faults, some are rather dumb, and none of them slam around like supermen. They win more by intelligent cooperation with the enemy's opposition than by their brawn, although they aren't

helpless when it comes to a good hand-to-hand battle. In many ways, of course, Cummings' characters are somewhat old-fashioned, but their good points overbalance that. I can nearly always find a Cummings character believable, even if I don't care for the person (and it doesn't always matter which side the character is on, either). Which is more than can be said of a great majority of the stalwart heroes and dark menaces of science fiction novels."

A SIZEABLE batch of the fan journals has come in since we last reviewed any, so we'll devote a few lines to some of the outstanders now. First on our list (these aren't supposed to be in order of merit) is Henry Andrew Ackermann's "Wavelength." This is the second issue, and, while not the best thing out, is still worth your look-see. It's neatly mimeographed, costs ten cents, and is worth it for the article by Fred Pohl telling how a couple of our rival stf magazines got their start. Ackermann's address is 5200 Maple Avenue, "Pimlico," Baltimore, Maryland.

Phil Bronson, whom we met at Denver, is a quiet chap who comes out now and then with a whooping good issue of "Fantasite." Every two months, to be precise. It's mimeographed in several colors, has an extensive and complete column of reviews on the professional stf books as well as its rival fanzines, and features interesting items by well-known figures in the fan world. Of particular interest is an anonymous column entitled "Hell Fire." The present issue is full of controversial material, such as we like to see. Recommended, and Phil's address is 224 West 6th Street, Hastings, Minnesota. Enclose a dime when you send for your copy.

Art Widner of Box 122, Bryant, Mass., is well known among the fans as the conductor of polls on various subjects relating to stf. He's also known for his editing of "Fanfare," our choice for the top-ranking fanzine going today. This, too, is mimeographed and costs ten cents per issue. Current number features several nifty columns: Joe Gilbert's "Slam!Der," H. C. Koenig's caustic "Their Own Petard" (which consists of pointing out boners in the professional and fan books) and an utterly delightful, wacky thing called "The Goat-herd" which cannot adequately be described in detail. Try the current issue, say we.

And finally, for this time, we have Lou

Goldstone's "Fantasia." This is unbeatable in appearance, bearing excellent artwork and interesting material. It is issued quarterly, so there's not too much danger of its slipping in quality. The column, "Djinn Fizz," while verbose, is of enjoyable aspect, and you might like the fiction and poetry, which is well above average. Lou's address is 269 Sixteenth Avenue, San Francisco, California, and you won't regret having ventured ten cents on a copy.

IF you'd like to see a regular readers' department in *Science Fiction Quarterly*, we can always be influenced by requests. We can also be influenced by letters telling us what kinds of stories you'd like to see in future issues, what authors you'd like to see, which artists you prefer. Do you, for example, favor the longer or the shorter feature novels? This time, it's a bit shorter than usual, though still book-length.

That reminds us, book-length is a rather elastic term. It all depends upon what size book you are thinking of, what format, and so on. "Tarrano the Conqueror," for example, was somewhat longer than a great

many \$2 novels you buy—on the other hand, "Into the Fourth Dimension," while not as long as some, is no shorter than a surprisingly large number of books. Check up on it sometime; you may be astonished at the results.

THIS department is a sort of catch-all. We expect to spout here ourselves, to let our authors and artists sound off a bit, and we'll dig into the mail bag for interesting comments from readers. So don't consider a letter to *Science Fiction Quarterly* wasted; not only do we read all letters carefully and tabulate your reactions on stories, but you may see some of your pet paragraphs here, if they are of general enough interest and ole Massa Space permits.

IN our next issue—well, that's difficult to say right now. You'll find an outstanding science fiction novel, of that you may be sure. And as to the other tales—we'll be guided in a large extent by your letters, so don't forget to write. Until we meet here again next issue, then, happy reading!
RWL.

When Anteros Came

(Continued From Page 143)

and I was going too fast to complete my course safely. There was still a chance, though, if he didn't gain another foot. The cabin was as hot as a blast furnace, and the hull-beams creaked protestingly under the heavy thrust.

Then I heard a strangled sound from Duke.

"There it goes," he moaned.

"What?"

"His radio," came the mournful answer, and I felt a strong urge to burst into tears as he turned resignedly from the periscope. The radio—twelve pounds! All the difference in the world. Ours, curse the luck, had been considered an essential part of the controls and had been riveted to the board, and tools were of course non-entities. Hastily we stripped to our shorts and shot the excess clothing out the airlock, but of course Petrucelli had already thought of that.

Even as I watched, his acceleration be-

gan to build, and before thirty seconds had passed he had streaked out of sight.

The buzzer went off. That would be Lane, calling anxiously from a magnescop to find out what had happened. "Turn it off," I directed Duke miserably, then turned from the window with a jerk as the radio opened up on its own accord. Emergency power-beam! What—

"Lane warning all racers, warning all racers—calculations on approach of asteroid Anteros erroneous—Orbit has brought it into Earth's gravitational field—it has accelerated and is crossing the racing orbits—racers slow up—slow up—Anteros—"

"Petrucelli!" Duke gasped, twirling the periscope wheel with shaking fingers, while I braked the *Columbia* as fast as I dared. "No radio!"

Ahead, a flash of light spouted into a brilliant blue-white spot, paling the sun for an instant. Then it winked out.

We were in the clear.

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